

THE

MAGI AND THE STAR.

Des Morgenlands ahnende, blütenreiche Weisheit erkannte zuerst der neuen Zeit Beginn; zu des Königs demüthiger Wiege wies ihr ein Stern den Weg. In der weiten Zukunft Namen huldigten sie ihm mit Glanz und Duft, den höchsten Wundern der Natur.

Novalis.

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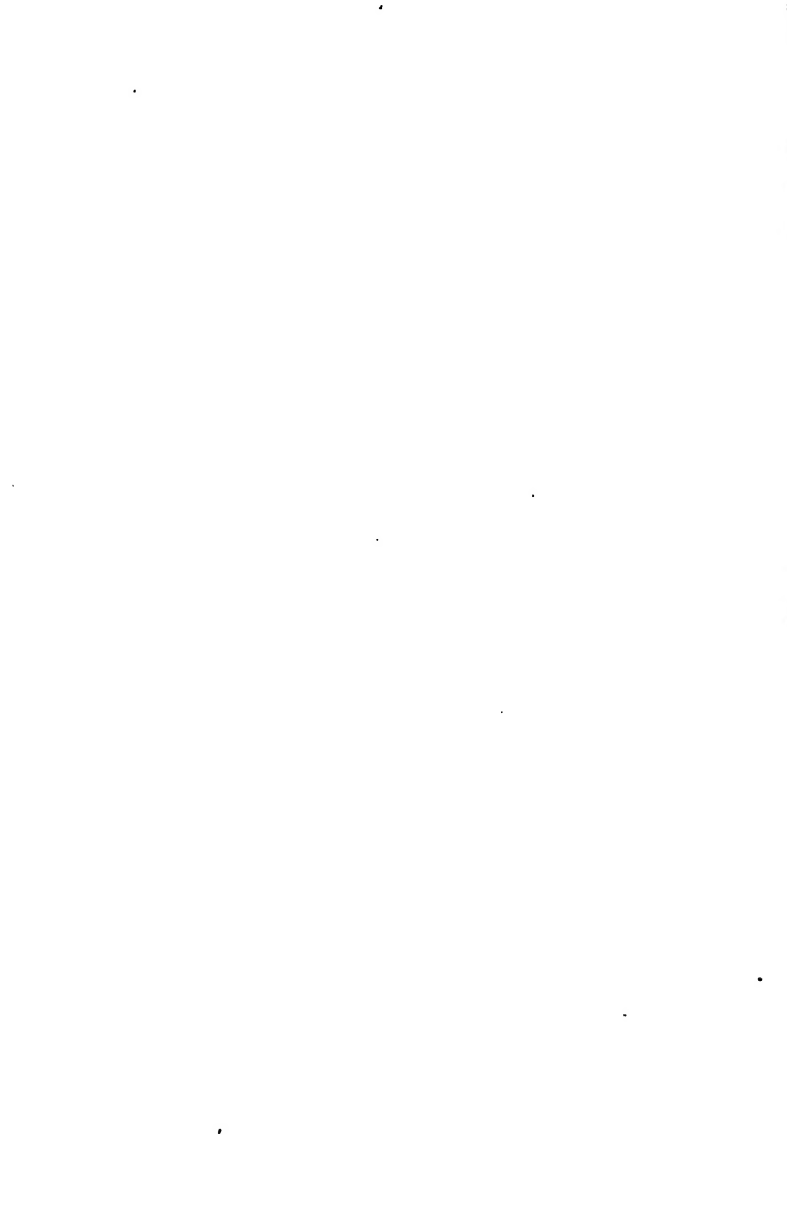
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TO THE MEMORY
OF
A BELOVED MOTHER
THESE PAGES
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.



SONNET.

Go, gentle Reader! with the Magi stray
In fancy o'er the golden East. Thou, too,
Hast a mysterious journey to pursue,—
The journey of thy Life—a varied way,
And wonderful. Awhile, serene and gay,
Thou retest near Joy's fountain where, around,
Love's flow'rs, like angel-gifts, o'erspread the ground,
And, like the dawn, Hope smiles with deep'ning ray.
But then, perhaps, borne on by Time, thy feet
Tread Sorrow's wilds, pierc'd by the thorns of Pain,
Or toss'd, perchance, on Passion's madd'ning main,
Thou sigh'st in vain some shelt'ring port to meet.
Oh, joy! if 'mid Life's toil, so hard and vain,
The Heav'n-sent Star of Faith thine anxious
eyes should greet!



INTRODUCTION.

A brief account of the Persian Magi, seems a proper Introduction to the following narrative.

The worship of the heavenly bodies was the first form of human idolatry.* Fire, the brightest emblem of the sun, became, by an easy transition, the next object of superstitious veneration. That this species of idolatry is of great antiquity, is evident from the fact, that of the various and multiplied rites which have distinguished the religions of different nations, the keeping up of a sacred fire has always formed a part.† It appears to have prevailed in the time of Abraham. "The name of the place in Mesopotamia in which the family of Abraham originally resided, styled Ur of the Chaldees, has usually been supposed to mean 'The Fire of the Chaldees,' on account of the fire-worship supposed to be carried on there.—And if this place were principally inhabited by heathen priests, whose creed was that of fire-worshippers, it is not at all unlikely that *עִיר־אֵשׁ*, *fire*, was a name given to it; especially as we find that such names were formerly given to places in Persia on the same account."‡

* See Job, c. 31, v. 26, 27.

† See the authorities quoted in Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon, under *עִיר־אֵשׁ*. This custom was found to prevail among the Natches in North America. "On entretenait," says Chateaubriand, "dans un vase de pierre, devant les symboles, un feu d'écorce de chêne qu'on ne laissait jamais éteindre, excepté la veille de la fête du feu nouveau ou de la moisson." Voyage en Amérique, p. 61. And see Mrs. Jameson's Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada. Vol. 3, p. 16.

‡ Dr. Lee's Hebrew Lexicon, p. 16.

This comparatively pure worship, which admitted no image of the Deity but Fire, was soon corrupted in various ways. But while the nations around them vied in multiplying their deities and images, the Persian priests or magi long retained the simplicity of their primitive faith. "It ought to be particularly observed," says Dr. Hyde, a warm defender of Persian orthodoxy, "that the nation of the ancient Persians, is the only one in the whole world, (except the holy race of the Israelites and Jews,) which has continually and constantly from its very origin, and from the deluge down to the present times, always preserved the knowledge and worship of the true God without any period of interruption."* Fire was the only material representation of the Deity they placed in their temples: they bowed before the burning altar, and before Mithra or the sun; but they declared that they worshipped God alone, and offered salutations to the sacred element only because it represented the purity of the Godhead, and to the sun because it approached nearest to the nature of fire. The other elements were also, in an inferior degree, the objects of their veneration, but only as being the workmanship and symbols of Deity.

The ancient Persians used to call their religion, the religion of Abraham: and Cherdolaomer, the king of Elam and Persia, having been conquered by Abraham, after the latter's conversion from idolatry, the Persians may at that time have adopted the faith professed by their conqueror.† According to Herodotus, "the Persians constructed no images, nor altars, nor temples, but considered it to be insane to do so, holding that the

* *Rel. Vet. Pers.*, p. 22, ed. 1760.

† *Ibid.* p. 83. *Genesis*, c. 14, v. 9, 17. "The Persians," says F. Schlegel, "were, in their religious belief and the character of their traditions, most akin to the Hebrews." *Hist. of Lit.* p. 122.

gods are not partakers of the nature or form of men. On the tops of the highest mountains they sacrificed to Jove, by which name they designated the circuit of the heavens: they sacrificed also to the sun and the moon, to the earth, the fire, the water, and the winds. The pious Persian, wearing a tiara wreathed with myrtle, led his victim to some pure spot, and there invoked the god: his prayers were not to be confined to his personal welfare, but to embrace that of all his countrymen: and his simple sacrifice was concluded by a theogony or ode on the origin of the gods, chanted by one of the Magi.* The mistakes in the above description are easily accounted for by the polytheism of the historian.

The following is the account of the Magi given by Ammianus Marcellinus. "Plato," he says,† "describes Magianism by the mystical word Machagistia, the purest form of divine worship.‡ To this science great additions were made, in ancient times, by Zoroaster, of Bactra, from the secret doctrines of the Chaldeans, and, afterwards, by the wise monarch Hystaspes, the father of Darius. He having penetrated more boldly than his predecessors into the concealments of Upper India, came to a certain shady solitude whose still retirements form a grateful residence for the lofty-minded Bramins. Having learned from their teachings§ as much as possible concerning the laws of creation, the motions of the stars, and the pure rites of sacred worship, he imparted to the Magi

* Clio, 131.

† Amm. Marc. lib. 23.

‡ *Mayeia*—*ἡ μυστικὴ μαγεία*. Plato. Alcib. 1.

§ "It was Zoroaster (not, as Ammianus asserts, his protector Gushtasp,) who travelled into India that he might receive information from the Bramens in theology and ethics." Sir W. Jones. Sixth Disc. before the Asiatic Society. That the author of the Zendavesta was much indebted to India, in its compilation, seems evident both from the traces of Hindoo superstition found in the work, as well as from the fact that a very great number of the words are pure Sanscrit.

what they had taught him. These things, together with the art of divination, the Magi handed down to posterity through their own children. In the course of centuries, down to the present day, a multitude, sprung from the same stock, is dedicated to the worship of the gods. They say, too, if it be credible, that fire fallen from heaven is kept among them in small fire-altars, and is never extinguished. A small portion of this fire, they say, was formerly carried before the kings of Persia to insure success. The number of persons sprung from this origin was small among the ancients, and the Persian authorities were accustomed to make use of their mysteries in celebrating divine worship: it was a crime, too, to approach the altar, or to touch the sacrifice, before the Magian had offered prayers, and poured out the preliminary libation. But having increased by degrees, they assumed the name and size of a nation; and, inhabiting villages unprotected by walls, and having permission to use their own laws, they are honoured in respect of their sacred character."

The history of Zoroaster or Zerdusht, the founder or reformer of the magian religion, is very obscure. There appear to have been two celebrated persons of the name, though some learned writers doubt whether more than one such individual ever existed. "Those bewildered men," says Bishop Warburton,* with his usual positiveness, "who would have us credit the story of a *late* Zoroaster, do and must suppose that he borrowed from Judaism. But the truth is, the whole is an idle tale, invented by Persian writers under the early califs. However, though the Zoroaster of Hyde and Prideaux be a mere phantom, yet the religion called by his name,

* Div. Leg. Vol. 2, p. 257 (1837).

was a real thing started up in the first ages of Mahometanism, with a bible to support its credit, in imitation of, and to oppose to, the Alcoran." Sir William Jones,* too, though he does not dispute that Zoroaster lived in the reign of Gushtasp, thinks that, subsequently at least to the Musselman invasion, the priests supplied the lost or mutilated books of this legislator by new compositions, partly from imperfect recollection, and partly from moral and religious knowledge gleaned from the Christians.

The former Zoroaster has been made a contemporary of Ninus,† (B. C. 2227.) The latter is generally supposed to have lived in the sixth century before Christ, in the reign of Darius Hystaspes, otherwise Gushtasp. He was born at Urumeah; and though of mean parentage, was skilled in all the learning of the East, and is said to have been well acquainted with the Jewish scriptures. It is asserted by some that he was of Jewish extraction, but this M. du Perron treats as a slander of the Mohammedans, though it has been thought that he was a servant to one of the prophets of Israel, who was probably either Ezekiel or Daniel.‡ Having retired to a cave in the Elburz mountains to purify his intellect by meditation and prayer, he there composed the Zendavesta§ to be the standard of the Magian Faith. Gushtasp became his patron, and a zealous convert to the reformed religion. The prophet finally fixed his dwelling at Bactra or Balkh, the capital of Bactriana, where he assumed and exercised the office of Archimagus or Supreme Head of the Magi, and that

* Sixth Discourse before the Asiatic Society.

† Justin. Hist. c. 1.

‡ Prideaux's Connexion, Vol. 1, An. 486.

§ This word means "an instrument for striking light;" or, according to some, "The Living Word."

city contained the metropolitan temple, and continued to be the residence of the Magian Pontiff till the invasion of the Mohammedans.

Of the various writings attributed to the prophet in ancient and modern times, the only work considered by most orientalists to be genuine, is a small portion of the *Zendavesta*, which was obtained with difficulty from the Parsees, about the middle of the last century, by the learned and indefatigable M. Anquetil du Perron.*

Before the time of Zoroaster the Persians performed their religious services in the open air: but to remedy the inconvenience arising from this practice, he caused temples to be erected over the altars. The first which he built was situated at Xiz, in Media, and the fire kindled by him on its altar the prophet declared he had received directly from heaven. A portion of this hallowed element was communicated to the other temples: and a new majesty was thus given to the great object of Persian adoration. This fire became the object of continual vigilance: in the larger temples it was constantly watched by four priests: it was fed with the cleanest wood, previously stripped of its bark; and when the priests recited the service before it they drew the lower part of their mitres before their mouths lest any pollution should reach it from their breath. Any insult offered to the holy symbol was punished with immediate death.

The reverence of the Magi for the four elements was excessive. They never blew out a candle, but suffered it to die out: they would not pour water upon the fire,

* What remains of this work has been translated by M. du Perron. There is an interesting sketch of its contents in Mr. Baillie Fraser's "*Persia*." (Edinburgh Cab. Lib.) And see Gibbon's *Rom. Emp.*, Vol. 1, c. 8; and *Ancient Universal History*, Vol. 5, c. 11.

thinking that by doing so they should be exciting an unholy war between the two elements: nor for the same reason did they ever thrust hot iron into water. Neither would they touch the fire with any sharp instrument lest they should seem to offer it violence. They did not bury or burn their dead, except their kings and great men, through fear of defiling the fire or the earth: but exposed them to be devoured by birds. If the earth were to be touched by a corpse, or even by the naked foot of a living man, the insulted element, it was thought, would shudder with indignation, and a heavy punishment would be incurred by the perpetrator of the outrage.*

The following is a brief outline of the tenets of the Magi. The doctrine of two principles, of good and evil, was the peculiar doctrine of the Magian faith from an early period.† Zoroaster, however, inculcated the belief in a superior power, called Zerwan or Time without beginning or end, to whom both Ormuzd, the spirit of goodness, and Ahriman, the spirit of evil, are subject. The writings of the prophet are filled with the history of the conflict of these intelligences, aided by their respective angels, which is to continue during the twelve thousand years there fixed as the duration of the present universe, at the close of which Goodness is finally to prevail. The Persian considered himself the peculiar favorite of Ormuzd, who, in later times, has been made to assume the character of a Supreme Deity, while Ahriman has been represented as a rebellious angel.

At death, the genii of the elements will claim and receive the divided portions of the human body. After

* The Sad-der Portæ, 37 and 38.

† This doctrine seems referred to in Job, c. 2, v. 10; and in Isaiah, c. 45, v. 7.

three days the angel Siroch will stand by the side of the spirit to conduct it to the bridge of Chinavad. On this 'narrow way,' leading directly to the world of spirits, will stand two angels by whom every passenger will be examined. In the hand of the former, who is the angel of mercy, will be held a balance to weigh the deeds of men; and according to his report to God, will the sentence be pronounced. Those whose good deeds are found to prevail in the smallest degree, will be suffered to pass on to Paradise: but those whose good actions are too light, will be hurled, by the angel of justice, headlong to hell.* It is also said that "when the good deeds prevail, the soul is met by a dazzling figure, which says, 'I am thy good angel, I was pure originally, but thy good deeds have rendered me purer;' and passing its hand over the neck of the blessed soul leads it to Paradise. If the iniquities preponderate, it is met by a hideous spectre, which howls out, 'I am thy evil angel—impure myself, thy sins have rendered me more foul—through thee shall we both become miserable till the resurrection:' on which it drags the sinning spirit to hell, where Ahriman taunts it with its folly and crimes."†

The rites of the Magi consisted of an endless variety of lustrations, genuflections, and prayers: and liturgies were read at stated periods, beside the fire-altar, by the priests. The Persian, at the age of fifteen, was arrayed in the sacred tunic and girdle, as a badge of divine protection, and a defence against Ahriman. This girdle was never to be laid aside, except in bed; and the first thing to be done on arising, was to bind it

* The *Sad-der Ports*, 1 and 2. And see Sale's *Koran*, Prel. Dis. Sect. 4.

† Fraser's *Persia*, p. 160.

round the waist, before which not a step was to be taken.*

Among foreign nations the Persian Magi were held in high repute for their wisdom. Some of the ancients considered them the fathers of philosophy, assigning to their doctrines a higher authority than to those of venerable Egypt.† Pythagoras is said to have been the pupil of Zoroaster. From the other sages of his time that philosopher gathered the principles of natural science; but from the Magi he learned the loftier lore of divine worship and the rules of morality; and by them he was taught to compare the body of God to light, and His soul to truth.‡ It was considered the highest honour for a stranger to be admitted into their sect: thus Artaxerxes, wishing to give Themistocles a high proof of his esteem, ordered him to be instructed in the religion of the Magi.§ The sect, however, lost much of its influence and purity during the subjection of Persia to the Macedonian and Parthian sway.

As it has been the opinion of many of the learned, that the Wise Men who brought presents to our Saviour were Persian Magi, I have thought that this idea had sufficient probability to form the basis of the following narrative. From what part of the East these learned strangers came, it is, of course, impossible to say: though it seems to have been some place at a considerable distance from Jerusalem. For, if, as is supposed, the miraculous light appeared to them at the time of our Lord's nativity, and if, as may be collected from Herod's command to destroy all the infants of Bethlehem from two years old and under, Jesus had,

* The Sad-der Portæ, 17 and 50.

† Diog. Laert. procem. ‡ Porphyr. de vitâ Pythag.

§ Plutarch.

on their arrival, entered his second year,* then the Wise Men, who, it may be conceived, set out immediately on beholding the star, would have consumed a whole year in their journey. And as it has been asserted by some writers that Zoroaster exercised the office of Archimagus at Bactra or Balkh†—that the Magian metropolitan temple was there, and that that city continued to be the residence of the visible head of the Magi till the invasion of the Mohammedans, I have ventured to suppose that the Wise Men may have come to Jerusalem from that place. It may be reasonably objected by the reader that I have represented the fire-worship as being in a purer and more flourishing state than is warranted by its actual condition under the Parthian rule: but I would observe, in justification of my having done so, that, though Magianism, during that period, was much degraded and corrupted by foreign idolatry, yet its adherents must have continued numerous; since in the year A. D. 226, when Ardeshir Babegan undertook to restore it to its pristine splendour, 80,000 priests of that religion attended the general council, summoned by him at Balkh; and there *might* have been among the Magi, even at the commencement of our era, *some* who retained in its purity what is declared to have been the doctrine of Zoroaster; and to them, as the least corrupt of the Gentiles, we may, I think, without any violent impropriety, imagine this wonderful revelation to have been made.

* See Parkhurst's Greek Lex. on *Διερῆς*.

† There is some doubt whether this did not occur at Bamian, the two places seeming to have been often confounded together.

PART THE FIRST.

THE VISION.

— In the scenic skies that wondrous Star
Came forth—and the myriads that spectators are
Of heavenly acts, baffled their lights in gloom,
To give the great Protagonist his way :
And the drama opened, that nor night nor day
Shall see consummate, till the final doom.

REV. H. ALFORD.

CHAPTER I.

THE Fire-temple of Balkh, at the period of our narrative, (about the commencement of the Christian era,) still preserved much of its ancient splendour as the metropolitan sanctuary of the Magian sect: that city having been, from the days of Zoroaster, the residence of the Persian Archimagus. The Magian priesthood had now, for centuries, been deprived of the political importance which they had formerly possessed throughout a very large portion of the East: but they endeavoured to console themselves for their exclusion from public affairs, by a strenuous application to philosophical pursuits, or to the duties of their worship: and in this remote spot, a little company of devoted priests, gathered round their pontiff, still preserved the purity of their faith in spite of the foreign idolatries which pressed upon them from every side. The nations around them had been convulsed by war, and subjected to repeated changes of government; but still had the Holy Fire of the Magi here continued to send up its fragrant flame towards heaven; and still was the Sun welcomed at his rising by their adoration and their hymns.

The sacred edifice was at a short distance from the town: and, occupying an open and commanding situation, it caught the first rays of the morning, and blushed beneath the last splendours of sunset. At-

tached to it were gardens and groves which extended to a considerable distance over the plain below. The cypress, the poplar, and the elm, formed the outward boundary of the enclosure: while in the more sheltered parts of the interior, were found fruit-trees and shrubs of various descriptions. Vines clung fondly to the gigantic trees, or formed graceful bowers. In the genial seasons of the year, the bright leaves of the orange-tree shone in the sun, while its drapery of white dropped fragrance, or gave place to the golden fruit,—the olive bent beneath its unctuous burden, and the pomegranate exhibited its scarlet, star-like blossoms, or luscious produce. In all directions, flowers of every scent and hue, disposed in picturesque masses, sprung up in regular succession beneath the care of the priests; who, as they stooped to commune with these delicate children of the earth, sometimes sighed that they could not find among them the famed rose of Zoroaster, the smell of which was said to have bestowed a perfect knowledge of all things, past, present, and to come.* Through a large part of the garden, glided a fountain, sometimes, like human life, sporting in the sunshine, and then creeping gloomily in the shade. Beneath embowered walks, formed of rows of chinar-trees, where many a bird was permitted to build its nest and dwell in security, might often be seen the stately forms of the Magi as they passed to and fro wrapt in meditation: and small alcoves, round which the rose was taught to expand its gorgeous petals, or the jessamine to scatter its snowy flowers, formed convenient seats, whence the adorer of Mithra might watch for the rising or setting of the brightest emblem of his God.

The temple was a circular stone edifice, the top of which was shaped like a dome, and surmounted by five pinnacles or cupolas, through which the smoke escaped. Three steps of variegated marble surrounded the building, and they, as well as the costly pavement of the interior, were worn and polished to an excessive brightness by the prostration of the worshippers. In the middle of the temple stood a chapel or screen which enclosed the consecrated fire, and prevented the sun's rays from falling upon it through the outer windows. No images nor paintings of human or animal shapes, were suffered to have place in the temple: but its walls were adorned with emblematic figures full of devout meaning—the ring of Ormuzd—the seven balls indicating the seven celestial intelligences—the beaming crown of Mithra—the club and arrows of Behram—the balance of the Genius of Justice, and many others, in which the initiated observer might trace the mystic struggles of Ormuzd and Ahri-man, and those of the angels whom they respectively had called into existence to assert their power—the dread ordeal of the bridge of Chinavad—the glories of the resurrection, and the final triumph of Goodness. In the midst of the inner shrine, on an altar richly sculptured with hieroglyphs, burned the Eternal Fire, which, as the pious Persian believed, was originally kindled by Divine Power, and was the most perfect earthly image of the Supreme. It was fed with scented wood, stripped of its bark, and occasionally with costly aromatics; and four priests were appointed at all times, by day and by night, to sit by the altar's side, to watch that the sacred flame was by no accident extinguished or polluted. The sun-light could not penetrate into

this hallowed enclosure, but the burning altar diffused through it an equable warmth at all seasons of the year. Thus illuminated by its own light, and filled with its own fragrant atmosphere, the shrine was independent of any changes in the external air, and symbolized, in some degree, the immutability and self-sufficiency of the Highest. In various parts of the sanctuary were seen the gorgeous vases used in the sacred services: some were of gold; and others were embossed with rubies, carbuncles, and other precious stones, most valued by the Magi on account of their fiery colour.

Near the temple were the residences of the priests and officers, the buildings in which were deposited the utensils employed in their worship, and, also, the watch-tower or observatory in which their astronomical discoveries were prosecuted.

It was a clear, bright night: though it was the month of December, winter's sharp winds were locked in their icy caverns, and somewhat of the warmth of summer brooded over the landscape. Not a cloud disturbed the holy quiet which sat on the brow of heaven: the moon, as she marched proudly along the sky, was casting around her glances of queenly pride: the stars were clustered in multitudinous array, like angels reclining watchfully by their urns of light, with eyes fixed in thoughtful abstraction, as though in expectation of some august event. On palace, temple, and cottage the tranquillizing moon-light slept: it robed in brightness the dark, lofty trees; and the shrubs and plants, which, beneath the prying gaze of day, would have looked tarnished and decayed, assumed somewhat of their former beauty beneath its chastening influence. The stream glided stealthily along, as though conscious

that heaven's thousand eyes were heedfully regarding its every step. The breeze, bearing on its wing fragrance and delight, crept softly from heaven to earth; and so deep, at times, was the silence, that even the fall of a withered leaf or a broken twig, as it dropped timidly on the ground, smote strangely on the sensitive ear. All was peace: every jarring passion was lulled to repose, and, seemingly, man might have walked forth fearless and happy, as though sin had never spread its snares, nor its victim ever listened to that voice which flatters only to destroy. It was a season such as the sage Chaldæan loved, in days of old, when in his lofty watch-tower he passed night's precious hours in inquisitive examination of the stars, proudly thinking that to him it was given to interpret the magic characters, traced upon their foreheads, into lessons of immutable truth.

Such was the night on which four priests were sitting in the temple we have attempted to describe, keeping the customary watch around the celestial fire. They were all men in the prime of life: their heads were adorned with white tiaras, from beneath which flowed their long dark hair: their ample beards lay in jetty curls: their garments were of crimson and confined at the waist by the sacred girdle with its four mystical knots:* on their feet were the sacerdotal sandals; and as, with their lofty, mitred foreheads, their eyes sparkling with the flickering light, and their rich garments glowing in the reflection of the flame, they sat round the altar in solemnity and silence, they bore an unearthly

* By these four knots the ancient Persian was reminded of four things: 1—The unity, holiness, and supremacy of God. 2—The existence of the true religion. 3—The Divine mission of Zoroaster; and 4—The necessity of good works.—THE SAD-DEH. *Porta* x.

appearance, like beings of another world—like sages of some far-off and heavenly clime, holding a mysterious council on matters too awful for human speech. They spoke not: and yet it was but seldom that their watch was performed in silence: for often did they vary the monotony of their duties by grave, though animated conversation on their own peculiar lore: they would point out to each other the beauties of their Prophet's sacred books, or engage in earnest discussion on some controverted points in his law: sometimes, too, they would talk of the secrets of nature, or draw strange prophecies from the teachings of the stars. But, on this occasion, they uttered not a word; and, but for their open and bright eyes, it might have been imagined that they slept. One of them, indeed, did not appear absorbed like the others: he often moved restlessly about: once or twice, too, he addressed his brethren by name; but receiving from them no reply, he also gave himself up to silence and his own meditations.

Before the eyes of three of those priests a vision was passing. It appeared to them that they were, as had frequently been their custom, perusing in company their hallowed Zendavesta. They were reading the place where, in veiled language, the Prophet alluded to the coming of ONE* of whom he apparently dared write only in dark and indistinct terms, as though, bewildered by the dazzling revelation, he could only describe, with a trembling hand, the marvels it displayed. Then, having closed the sacred scroll, they began to converse of Balaam, with whose history they were acquainted,

* "It is certain," says Hyde, "that the Persians had revealed to them the coming of the Messiah in the flesh, and that they foreknew his advent through the writings of Zoroaster."—*Rel. Pers. Præf.*; and p. 390.

—the unhappy prophet who had been permitted to look into the invisible world, but who had seen that *there* misery was to be his portion—who had heard unearthly voices and seen strange visions, but to whom every voice was eloquent of misery, and who from every vision gathered fresh assurance of despair. “I shall see Him,” had said the miserable seer, “but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a **STAR** out of Jacob.” Much did these Three Wise Men, in their vision, converse about the man who had shed on others a light so brilliant, while the profoundest darkness was his own doom; and many were the inquiries they made of each other concerning the nature of *that Star*, which should gild the firmament with a glory more intense than that of the bright-haired Mithra in his highest pride. While occupied in these musings a dazzling light seemed to fall from above, in the midst of which stood a glorious Shape. They were unable to discern distinctly either the form or the features; yet they were aware that an inhabitant of heaven was before them. They struggled to escape from the presence of a personage so august: but their terror was quelled by his voice, which told them that he was come on an embassy of joy: and eagerly did they listen to the accents which dropped, like the breath of flowers, from his mouth. “Go,” he said, “to Jerusalem: seek and worship Him who is this day born King of the Jews. **BEHOLD HIS STAR!**” And he raised his hand, and pointed to the sky. It was night: and many stars were glittering in the heavens; but their eyes followed whither he directed them, and there they beheld a brilliant Star, such as they had never seen before. And, then, suddenly there came floating towards them the

sound of music of such ravishing sweetness, that it appeared as though to mortal ears had been vouchsafed some notes of the high service of the hierarchies of heaven.

The vision passed away. Starting from their trance, the three priests hurried with one accord to the temple-porch; and, on looking up towards the star-spangled sky, they saw there one sparkling luminary which they had never perceived before. It was not a comet, such as that on which they had once gazed with curiosity and apprehension: it was no meteor, like those they had often beheld, flinging light across the firmament: it was not one of the sons of the belted Orion, nor any other of the sweet stars with which night usually adorns her coronet, for with each of these they were familiar: it was different, far different from them all: it was brighter than any one of heaven's radiant host: it twinkled not, but shone with a firm and cheering light. Long and ardently did they gaze upon it; and then they turned and looked consciously at each other. The same vision had been revealed to the Three: and they all knew and felt that they had seen a celestial messenger, sent to announce the approach of Him of whom prophets had spoken, and that their eyes were now beholding HIS STAR.*

At length the Three Magi returned to their brother, who had remained, wondering, in the temple. They asked him to try whether he could discern anything new or strange in the heavens. He accordingly came forward and looked narrowly round the sky; but de-

* It is the opinion of many divines that the appearance of the Star was accompanied by some other revelation to teach the Sages its meaning. "Star-light," says South, "is but a dim light to read the small characters of such mysteries by. He only that made the stars could discover it."

clared that he saw nothing there but the pale stars and the solemn moon.

The priests had not long resumed their stations around the altar when the dawn began rapidly to advance, and the time arrived when four other priests were accustomed to take the place of those then in attendance at the temple. They came: and eagerly did the Three Wise Men welcome them, and enquire if *they* beheld any thing peculiar in the sky. The latter gazed and gazed again; but the mystic apparition was concealed also from them.

Then did Aruphon, Hurmon, and Tachshesh,* the Magi to whom alone this mystery had been shewn, perceive that they were singled out by Heaven for some great employ.

"We will obey the mandate," exclaimed Aruphon; "we will go to Jerusalem."

"We will go to Jerusalem!" echoed the other two; "and may the Great King† be our guide!" and then the Three turned to gaze once more on the Star. For a few moments it shot forth rays more deeply vivid than before, and then slowly ascended till it was lost amid the depths of the sky.

"Heaven approves our determination," cried Aruphon—"the bright messenger, having accomplished its design, has returned to its exalted home. But be not discouraged, brethren; we shall doubtless behold it again."

The priests stood beside the altar, watching for the earliest ray of their beloved Sun. The fresh breeze told of the approach of morn,—the faded moon had

* These names are given by Bar Bahlul, quoted by Hyde, p. 383.

† The word Ormuzd signifies "great king."

disappeared, and a rosy flush was beginning to colour the sky. The yellow tint of the eastern horizon deepened into orange,—the orange gradually grew into crimson, and at length the Sun lifted up his beauteous head. As soon as his adorers beheld it, their foreheads touched the dust; and, with their faces turned both towards the sacred fire and the rising sun, they remained for some time prostrate in private adoration, their lips emitting only an inarticulate murmuring. At length, having arisen from this lowly attitude, they cast pieces of aromatic wood into the flame, which blazed up brightly as though grateful for the offering. They afterwards scattered perfume on their garments,—sprinkled holy water about to drive evil spirits to a distance, and carefully protected the fire from any pollution from their breath by tying across their mouths the lappets of their mitres. They then took from the golden box, containing the white rods of a span long, duly prepared for their worship, the proper number appointed for the occasion; and holding a bunch of these in the left hand, and the ritual in the right, they proceeded to recite the usual hymn in regular and melodious cadence; while at intervals their heads were again bowed to the earth, and, occasionally, in imitation of their prophet, they each arose on one foot, in the vehemency of prayer. The sentiments of the hymn (which, however, was not in verse) may be thus expressed:—

MORNING HYMN OF THE MAGI.

ALMIGHTY! lo, thy priests once more
Are gather'd at thine altar's side,
As royal Mithra rises o'er
Our dwellings in his wonted pride.

Fair as when first array'd in light
 By thy strong right-hand shines he now,
 For age can strew no locks of white
 Above that calm, imperial brow.
 Source of light and life eternal!
 Lo! thy priests to greet thee bend,
 And to thee their songs ascend.

The wintry earth, amid her tears,
 Puts on a smile when he is nigh;
 Touch'd by his ray, the cloud appears
 A mount of gold amid the sky.
 The envious mist, which fain would dim,
 A robe to swell his glory lends;
 And every lofty tree to him
 Its head in adoration bends.
 Fair is all thy wide creation!
 O how fair, then, Lord of love!
 The rose-bowers* that bloom above!

Most merciful! stoop down and bless
 Thine erring children, poor and blind;
 For still they, in their helplessness,
 Are seeking what they cannot find;
 While thou, if thou for them wouldst seek,
 Needst not to search creation round,
 For lo! forthwith thy creatures weak
 In their creator's hand are found.†
 Friend of man and Fount of Mercy!
 Interpose thine arm of power,
 Save us in death's evil hour.

* The expression *Paradisi rosarium* occurs in the *Sad-der*, P. ix.

† "Nothing is weaker than the creature: for if the creature seek anything, he does not find it. And nothing is stronger than the Creator; for if at any time He seek the creature, he is forthwith in His hand and power."
 —From the *Persic* of *Tabari*. Quoted by *Hyde*, p. 155.

Before thy mediator's* throne
Thy favour'd priests their worship yield :
Thou hast thyself in Mithra shewn,
On him thy living image seal'd.
And thus around thy kindling shrine
Will we in waiting patience kneel,
Till thou in full-orb'd pomp shalt shine,
In thine *own* Light Thyself reveal.
Source of Wisdom! Kind Preceptor!
Guide thy priests who look with awe
On the marvels of thy law.

Having finished their recitations, they cast upon the altar the consecrated rods, which it was unlawful to use a second time, or to apply to any profane purpose ; and the rites were then over.

* Mithra is said to be the Mediator between Ormuzd and his creatures.

CHAPTER II.

FILLED with wonder at the extraordinary revelation that had been made to them, the Magi went to their homes to enjoy a brief repose. They afterwards returned to the temple to assist in the high service over which the Archimagus presided, and which was celebrated with considerable splendour every day. The more devout of such of the inhabitants as were followers of Zoroaster, then attended the temple to offer thanks for the return of light, to supplicate a blessing on their labours, and to confess their hopes and fears before the eternal Fire, which was to them the visible presence of heaven. As soon as the worship had been performed, Aruphon, Hurmon, and Tachshesh proceeded to the palace of the Archimagus. They stated the vision to the venerable pontiff, and announcing their intention of immediately obeying the mandate thus marvellously given, entreated his blessing on the enterprize. The Chief Priest, having listened with the surprise which such a narrative was calculated to excite, enquired minutely into the circumstances of the vision, and at first hesitated to sanction in any way so wild an expedition: but the calm earnestness of the priests, together with the deep reverence for the mysteries of the unseen world which the nature of his priestly avocations tended to nourish,

prevented him from treating the matter as of slight importance.

"Your statement, my children," he said, after a long pause of meditation, "has filled me with wonder and perplexity. But whither can man better repair, in the hour of his ignorance, than to Ormuzd the Enlightener and Guide of the world? The stars have already spoken; the good spirits who inhabit them will not then remain silent. Accompany me, my sons: I will consult the Great King, and we will be directed by His teaching."

At the rear of the temple there was a secret shrine accessible to the High Priest alone, and never entered even by him except for the purpose of discovering the will of heaven on very solemn occasions. To this sacred spot did the Archimagus now repair, followed by the three priests. Having passed through the public part of the temple, and threaded various passages and turnings, they stood before the entrance of the oracular shrine. The inferior priests remained on the outside, prostrated in prayer; while the Archimagus, throwing open the gilded doors, softly advanced into the awful place.

It was a small circular apartment: on the ceiling glittered the zodiac with its signs graven in gold: symbols and hieroglyphs of various forms covered the walls in imitation of the Mithratic cave of Zoroaster. At the eastern end was a small table or altar of marble, also adorned with emblematic figures, on which, shrined in a casket studded with jewels, lay a small scroll, a precious volume written in letters of gold, and said to have been, both in composition and writing, the work of Zoroaster's own hand, and of which no other copy existed. Before this altar, on an alabaster pillar, burned

a golden lamp, the flame of which, kindled originally from the sacred Fire, and fed by some bituminous liquid, required to be replenished only at very distant intervals. The scroll was never read but by the light of the consecrated lamp; and from its letters thus illuminated, the Pontiff was wont to gather his supposed knowledge of the Future.

The Archimagus commenced by sprinkling around the room some holy water to nullify the influence of Ahriman. He afterwards anointed his eyes and mouth with the consecrated juice of the *hom*;* and then, prostrating himself before the altar, prayed to the Great King.—“ O Ormuzd,” he began, “ Source of Light! Giver of Wisdom! Thou who sittest upon the throne of the good and the perfect! In our necessity we turn to thee. The sky has spoken, but thou only canst interpret its voice: a strange prodigy has broken the harmony of the celestial host, and thou alone canst tell us its meaning. An unknown star has been discovered, new graven† on heaven’s glorious dome; and we know not to whose destiny it is linked, or by what intelligence it is occupied. Are thy prophet’s dim words about to brighten into fulfilment, and is the Desired One at hand? Is HE coming, O thou Maintainer of the world? All around is mystery and silence: but I come to thee in thy most secret shrine, and beneath the light of thy holy fire will I open reverently thy prophet’s book. Shed thy rays upon its letters, O thou Sun of Wisdom! and reveal to me the truth.”

The aged man arose from his knees, approached the altar, and carefully opening the casket, proceeded to

* A shrub held sacred by the Magi.

† “ Thy star new graven in heaven.”—Milton.

unroll the sacred volume. Scarcely had he touched it when the fire-lamp suddenly expired, and a total darkness filled the room. Hastily dropping the holy book, the High Priest rushed in horror from the shrine: on the outside he found the Three Magi still prostrate in prayer: they arose at the sound of his footsteps, but they shuddered when they beheld the ghastly countenance and trembling limbs of the Pontiff, whose palsied lips struggled in vain for utterance.

"My children," said the Archimagus, as soon as he could articulate, "Ormuzd refuses to answer. His countenance is turned from us in anger. *The lamp is gone out in the oracle of truth!*"

"Fear not, holy father," cried Aruphon, confidently, "Ormuzd has *not* turned away from us in anger. He has given us the answer we seek. Does he not declare that a higher teacher is at hand, and that therefore the mystic lamp will be needed no more?"*

"Thy words are cheering, my son," said the High-priest, gathering courage from this new interpretation. "May the Great King grant that they give the true signification of this prodigy! Go then, my children, as your vision has bid you. It will be a dangerous and toilsome journey; but doubtless He who has inspired the intention, will bring about its accomplishment. Go, then, adorers of Ormuzd," he continued, "go to Jerusalem, which, it appears, is to be first honoured by the footsteps of this majestic personage. Our prophet has foretold the coming of some noble Being before whom even Mithra's imperial splendour should wax pale. It may be the purpose of Heaven that the world should

* "Henceforth oracles are ceased,
God hath now sent his living oracle
Into the world to teach his final will."—Milton.

now be suffered to rejoice in His presence. Go, tender at His feet the homage of the Magi—make to Him those offerings which may best manifest our love: and may the smile of God be as a lamp in the darkness to guide you to the object of your pursuit! May it be to you a canopy from the heat and a shelter from the storm; and may you be brought back again, laden with joyful tidings, to the land which will soon grow impatient for your return!”

Turning their backs on the now dark and silent oracle the priests returned together to the palace of the Archimagus. There they listened deferentially to the parting admonitions of their Superior; and having received, with prostrate heads, his benediction, which was pronounced in broken accents, they retired in tears from his presence: and the aged prelate immediately gave directions that a talent of gold and some choice spices should be sent to their dwellings.

The three priests employed the remainder of that day and the following one in preparations necessary for their intended journey: they obtained fleet and strong horses for themselves and their attendants; they engaged a guide well acquainted with the country, and they collected some of the most valuable things they possessed, which, with the presents of the Archimagus, and the requisite baggage, were laid on the backs of camels, and committed to the care of trusty servants who were overjoyed at being selected for the companions of the enterprize.

In these labours the time rapidly passed, and the evening previous to their departure, was devoted to friendly discourse. The relations and associates of the Three Wise Men, gathered around them: and while

partaking together of a temperate meal, they conversed of the past and the future, of the doubts under which they had trembled, and of the hopes which bloomed invitingly in the distance: nor did they separate till the night was very far advanced, when the Three Magi retired to their couches to snatch a few hours of disturbed and dreamy slumber.

With the first blush of morning Aruphon, Hurmon, and Tachshesh sprung from their beds, hailing his approach as that of an expected but lingering friend. They first visited the temple with prayer and offering; and their worship was hallowed by a peculiar solemnity when they reflected on the different feelings with which they might again approach its venerated walls, and on the wonders they might behold ere they again bowed before its altar or roamed through its groves. As they gazed on the mystical fire which had glowed for centuries in purity and fragrance, they thought that soon, perhaps, they should be permitted to behold a far more august Light, of which Persia's treasured flame would be but a feeble image; and that then instead of bowing before a material splendour, their worship would be offered to the unveiled glory of the Lord of Truth.

With a confident reliance on celestial support, which nothing could daunt, and a devout expectation that by some joyful event their travels would be terminated, they turned away from the scene of their holy ministrations, and proceeded to set out on their hazardous journey. Neither the very long distance which they would have to traverse,—the snow-storms that might overtake them among the mountains,—the deserts they must pass, where wild beasts often stopped the traveller's progress, and the moving sand, the scorching simoon,

and the deceptive stream threatened his destruction,—nor the robbers who rendered many parts of the road extremely perilous, availed aught to quench that unconquerable spirit of determination which, kindled within them originally by a supernatural influence, was sustained by causes having no affinity with the inducements of ordinary life.

The reasons of their strange expedition, the prompter of the enterprize, and the object of their search, had become generally known to the inhabitants of Balkh. Among many of them something of a kindred zeal was excited: they, too, had heard the rumoured expectation of a coming Deliverer, and willingly would some have accompanied the Three Magi, and braved with them all the dangers of the way, had they not believed that those holy men were especially appointed by Heaven for the work, and that to them only would the necessary communication be made.

Solemnly and slowly did the departing train move onwards through crowds of gazing citizens. In front of the procession walked four priests, deputed by the Archimagus to accompany the travellers as far as the gates of the city, and who bore on a portable altar a small portion of the sacred fire. Then came the favoured Three, mounted on noble white horses, richly caparisoned, and followed by their attendants with the loaded camels. Behind, and on all sides, swarmed a multitude of people who heaped blessings on the heads of the travellers, and breathed forth earnest prayers for their safety and success. Having reached the city-gates they paused awhile to bid farewell to their brethren and friends, and then pressed eagerly on in their extraordinary embassy. From some of the eminences of the

town long did the citizens watch the progress of the travellers; and scarcely had the windings of the road hid them from their eyes, when they began to calculate the period when their return might be looked for, and the first tidings received of that mystery they were thirsting to know. Gathered in groups, in various parts of the city, they continued to discuss the engrossing subject: and it was only after a considerable interval of time, and with much reluctance, that they again betook themselves to their usual employments.

PART THE SECOND.

THE JOURNEY.

See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet.

MILTON.

CHAPTER I.

It must have been with feelings of deep satisfaction, not unmixed with awe, that the Three Magi found themselves actually on their way towards Jerusalem; though it has been reserved for after times to conceive the full dignity of their character as the ambassadors of the whole Gentile world to its desired King. They were the representatives of the wisdom of the East; that lofty science which the uninitiated multitude contemplated with envious admiration, but whose chief value, its possessors well knew, consisted in the conviction which it gave of the insufficiency of human reason to discover Truth without the aid of Heaven. And now *that* aid seemed to be at hand,—that ardent longing for a further revelation, which, in the bosom of many a philosopher, had arisen to the vehemence of a passion, seemed to have found an object to which it might cling; and, instead of the bewildering meteors that had long played amid the intellectual firmament, one luminary had, at last, appeared which promised to be the morning-star of a new and brighter day.

On first leaving Balkh, the attention of our travellers was divided by the pleasant scenery of its immediate environs: the fields, of an agreeable variety of colour, were animated with the moving forms of the cattle and

their keepers: the peasants were busied in the rice-grounds whose adjacent lakes or tanks glittered in the sun, and occasionally the deer were seen gaily chasing each other, or standing, motionless with surprise, to gaze on the caravan. But as they advanced they left the marks of human habitation behind them, and at length even the solitary cottage of the shepherd or herdsman, ceased to break the monotony of the scene. Then, as they began to traverse vast heaths where the road, rugged and stony, was garnished only by the mockery of herbage,—where around them was desolation, and before them obscurity, they found in the strangeness of their situation a meet emblem of their moral state as persons who now stood alone in the world, having left behind them their familiar haunts and accustomed lore, but as yet beholding not the anticipated possession which was to make them rich amends for all.

It is not our intention to follow the Magi, step by step, through the various countries they were obliged to cross in their way to Jerusalem. By day they pressed onward with untiring energy, stopping only for necessary refreshment and rest: and at night they reposed in their tents, or availed themselves of such scanty accommodations as the caravanserais of the towns or villages through which they passed could afford them. They climbed hills: they forded rivers: they pierced through craggy defiles, where snow and sleet and cutting winds beat upon them, and where the huge twisted horns of the mountain-goat were seen, bending over the precipice, as he stood watching the wanderers in their difficult progress below: they traversed vast deserts, disturbing the wild asses in their solitary home: they wended their toilsome way through tracts of country where no tree

spread its branches, no flower scattered its blossoms, no grass soothed the tread, nor rill trickled over the chinked soil, but where the white, shining sand extended for miles and miles, dazzling the eyes, and drying up the frame. Still they advanced without any avoidable delay, though they met with many vexatious hinderances, and their journey was several times postponed for weeks through the inclemency of the weather. They sometimes were so fortunate as to meet with a caravan, journeying in the direction they were pursuing; but oftener they passed on for long miles in solitude.

The talk by which they would endeavour to beguile their impatience and accelerate the march of the hours, would, of course, centre in the one object of their journey. Thoughts often indulged in before, but which they had not hitherto dared to express,—fancies which had often played around them, but had refused to assume a tangible form,—they now ventured to communicate to each other, emboldened by the thought, that the God they worshipped, conscious of their secret wishes and aspirations, had stamped them with His approbation, since He had thus selected the persons who had entertained them for an enterprize which seemed to promise their fulfilment.

We will attempt to record some of their conversations, but in doing so, we shall not always think it necessary to give particulars of time and place.

CHAPTER II.

ON one occasion the Three Wise Men were reposing after a tedious march by the side of a fountain, where, having refreshed their weariness by food and sleep, they awoke very early in the morning: but the sun had not yet arisen; and as they dared not proceed till he had come forth to bless them with his protecting presence,* they devoted the intermediate time to conversation; and Aruphon thus began:—

“Has it not often occurred to you, my brethren, that the world needs much some Great Teacher such as we trust He will prove to be whom we are hastening to meet? Has not the *necessity* of some further revelation of the Invisible often presented itself to your minds, when, while engaged in profound contemplation on the nature of things, and on man’s destiny, you have felt that there has been around you a darkness which nothing but a light from heaven could dispel? We, as priests of Ormuzd, have ever devoted ourselves to sublime employments: ours has been the task to present to heaven the prayers and offerings of the people,—to watch and feed the sacred flame,—to study and explain the written law of our Prophet. We have learned the language of

* *Patrio more Persarum traditum est, orto sole demum procedere. Quint, Curt. lib. iii.*

the stars,—we have followed philosophy to its secret recesses; and with patient steps have we threaded the winding paths of science, fondly hoping that they were conducting us to the temple of Truth. By us, then, if by any, must wisdom have been found; but can we venture to say that we have found it?"

"No;" replied Hurmon, "we have not found it; and while pursuing such enquiries as those you have mentioned I have appeared to be wandering in some subterranean shrine where, though the whole spot was hallowed, a Guide was needed to direct my steps. I have asked, 'What is the origin of evil? How can its existence be reconciled with the operations of a merciful and supreme Being?*' Why is Ahriman permitted to exercise any influence on a world which Ormuzd has created and governs? Is man to be liberated from suffering and death, or is he made for no other purpose than to pass a few short years of restlessness and pain, and then disappear for ever?' I have turned for a reply to the writings of Zoroaster: I have found there trivial precepts or lengthened allegories; and the light cast on these subjects seemed intentionally obscured. I have devoutly bowed my head before the teachings of the prophet, but my mind has remained unsatisfied by his statements: I have seen a glittering eminence before me, but I knew no way of reaching it; and have been compelled to confess that, even should his Book *be* the word of God, the Interpreter of it must still be to come. And if we apply ourselves to those magical arts inherited from our predecessors, alas! how useless are they all!

* "The question why light and darkness, good and evil, were mingled together by a beneficent and omnipotent Creator, has been as much controverted among the Magian priesthood, as by modern metaphysicians."—Fraser.

What wonders they may have operated in past times I know not : but when *I* have drawn the circle, and waved the wand, and, having uttered words that were to summon demons to do my bidding, have stood waiting for some reply, no sound has reached my ear save the laughter of the breeze as it swept by me in mockery, or the loud beating of my own terror-stricken heart."

"If then," exclaimed Tachshesh, "all the knowledge that *we* have gained, be but a perception of ignorance,—if *our* wisdom be but as a lamp glimmering amid the mist of a sepulchre, and revealing only emptiness or corruption, how deep must be the mental darkness of the rest of mankind from whom are withheld even the scanty advantages we possess ! All that *they* can know of religion comes to them couched in fables and allegories, which, however useful in adorning or illustrating truths well understood, are altogether vain for the purpose of conveying unknown doctrines to the multitude. They see us bow before the Sun and the Fire, and they, too, worship at our side : but do they always remember that our devotions are to be paid only to Him of whom that Sun is a faint and distant image ? We offer wine and fruits to the spirits of the dead, and we thus acknowledge their immortality ; but what gross conceptions have been gathered from this practice by ordinary minds ! There are noble and consoling truths wrapped up in those symbols of which Egypt has ever been so fond, and some of which we have adopted—such as the wreathed serpent, telling of eternity*—the mystic beetle of the Nile, shadowing out the resurrection of the

* To the Magi it symbolized the Sun's orbit.

body, and the numerous images which crowd their temples, and display to the initiated the various attributes of God. But what do the common people know of these concealed verities? They bow, indeed, before the emblems, yet they know nothing of what they represent; and they often tremble before some hideous shape, which, if properly interpreted, might bring to them a message of love. As it is delightful to follow with our eyes some bird soaring high in heaven, endeavouring to recognize its form in the diminished speck almost lost to sight; so it may be pleasing to the solitary sage to trace the features of truth in an obscure symbol:—but to persons, incompetent, or unwilling to pursue the necessary inquiries, symbolic images can convey no useful lessons: for by the contemplation of them, they only exchange the slumber of ignorance for the troubled dreams of superstition.”

“In some respects, certainly,” observed Aruphon, “their case must be worse than ours: yet if we compare our wisdom with their simplicity, how little occasion shall we have to boast! In our search after truth we are led beyond the written law of our prophet, and what then are our boasted disquisitions, but structures having no foundation except in our own imagination? I have occasionally met with foreign philosophers who have related to me the tenets of their different sects, and I have found each one strenuous for his own belief, and each one loudly condemning that of all others; but they can give us no evidence as to which is right. Their own belief is all that the followers of any particular doctrine have been able to give us in its support. Which of the opinions that now distract the world

is true, they say, some God must determine.* But while we are unable to adduce any divine sanction on behalf of our doctrines,—while there hangs a single doubt over our reasonings on behalf of virtue, there is an impregnable defence thrown up against all our attacks on the world of evil around us. For how can we induce the voluptuary, for instance, to give up his present pleasure, which he feels and knows to be real, for the sake of a future blessedness, of which we can only hold out a remote probability scarcely reaching to a hope?"

"But the Jews," remarked Tachshesh, "seem to claim a superior authority for the doctrines of their prophets."

"The Jews, indeed," answered Aruphon, "have ever appeared to possess a knowledge of the true God more profound even than our own. I have often conversed with persons of that nation, and I have read some fragments from their prophetic books, and I cannot but think there is some deep mystery connected with that people. Though occasionally abandoning themselves to idolatrous worship, yet there have always been among them some who have asserted the majesty of the One God. Even when driven from their country into captivity, they have still looked forward to the advent of a Prince whom they call the Messiah. And this belief in a coming Deliverer, is the most remarkable feature of their history. It seems woven into the very texture of their civil and religious polity: all the services of their temple have reference to it; and the Hebrew wife makes it the great object of her prayers that she may be the mother of a son,

* Tullius expositis horum omnium de immortalitate ac morte sententiis, nescire se quid sit verum pronuntiavit. Harum, inquit, sententiarum quæ vera sit Deus aliquis viderit. Lactant. Div. Inst. lib. 7, c. 8.

and that that son may be the Restorer of Israel. Even when defeated in battle, dragged into bondage, or scattered among the nations, still have they clung to this hope as the pledge of a future exaltation ; and in every calamity it has afforded a buoyancy of spirit, lifting them above despair. Prophet after prophet has appeared among them, charged with denunciations of vengeance or assurances of mercy ; and from some of them, especially from the learned Daniel, the Archimagus of Babylon, our own Zoroaster gathered much of his wisdom. And do you not remember that wondrous prophecy of their sublime Isaiah, in which the victories of our great Cyrus were circumstantially foretold, two centuries before his birth—in which he is addressed by name in the most affectionate terms as one who was to cause Jerusalem to be rebuilt—and which, rebuking the ancient error of our nation,—the doctrine of two independent and opposite principles,—declares to the future conqueror, in language of incomparable majesty, the unity and supremacy of God ?* Many are the benefits which, through this singular nation, have been bestowed on mankind ; and who can tell but that from among them (as our vision would seem to intimate) may at length arise the Mighty One, on whom are waiting the eyes of all ? Yet even this favoured people appears now to be departing from its ancient fidelity ;—a cloud has enveloped the golden glories of Jerusalem : for I have heard from those who have lately visited that city, that the Jews are divided into sects, feeling towards each other the bitterest animosity,—that the corruptions of Rome are rapidly making way among them,—that a golden eagle has been placed over the great gate of the temple, and that a

* See Isaiah c. xlv, v. 28, and c. xlv.

theatre has been built, where the games of the circus are celebrated with much pomp.* They seem to have forgotten their Jehovah, and an almost universal profligacy of manners has overtaken them."

"But I was going on to observe," he continued, "that this spiritual ignorance of which we have been complaining, has everywhere produced its necessary results,—guilt and misery. The throne has frequently been the seat of tyranny and cruelty, and the dwellings of the poor have sent forth sedition and turbulence. War, devouring war, has slain its thousands, and the population of a kingdom has been exhausted to avenge the fancied injuries of a single man. Often have the fields been covered at evening with the mutilated corpses of multitudes who, in the morning, trod their surface with the firm step of health, feeding on the hope of long, sunny days of joy; and 'the earth deprived of her children, has cried even to the gate of heaven.'† While to those who have survived the work of carnage a more miserable lot has fallen: for some have wandered, heart-broken, to their homes; and others, torn from the pleasant haunts of their childhood,—from their commodious habitations, and from the beloved ones, who made those habitations a paradise, have been forced, as slaves, to some distant land, where the inclemency of a sky, darkened by frequent tempests, has aggravated the horrors of a perpetual captivity. Oh! when we look around and see how weakness is made to bow its meek head in the presence of power,—how innocence is trampled on by the reckless steps of pride,—how wantonly the fondest ties of affection are rent asunder, and how the finest feelings of our

* See Josephus. Ant. B. 17, c. 6, s. 2; and B. 15, c. 8, s. 1.

† Book of Enoch.

nature are made the instruments of treachery and turned against our own bosoms, we are tempted to imprecate vengeance on the heads of the guilty, and to ask, 'Oh! God! where sleeps Thy thunder?'—till, on cooler reflection, we recur to better sentiments; and, remembering the iniquities of which conscience can justly accuse ourselves, instead of calling for judgment on the sins of our brethren, we learn to kneel and ask pardon for our own."

"And then," observed Tachshesh, "there is a Prince who presides over this empire of evil; and how mysteriously are the workings of that Dark one interwoven with the destinies of man! Do we not live in continual dread of the wicked and powerful Ahriman," (and he pronounced the name in low and shuddering accents,) "from whose malignity man has at present every thing to fear? Our childhood was arrayed in the sacred tunic and girdle that we might remember, and be saved from his influence: and it is only in inverted letters that we dare to write his name. We believe that, having pierced the egg of Ormuzd and marred the smooth outline of his fair creation, he is still found thwarting his benevolence, and following his steps, as he proceeds in his work of goodness, to taint every production of Omnipotence with his poisonous touch. Are not the noble passions of our nature perverted by him from their original design, and made instruments for inflicting upon us a yet more degrading slavery? When we are anxious to devote ourselves to religious contemplation, does he not seduce our piety into the mad excesses of superstition, or mingle with it a contempt for our fellow-men, so that often when we think we are worshipping Goodness, we are really serving Evil? When we are poor, he teaches us dis-

content : when we are rich, he plunges us into sensuality and pride : of kings he makes tyrants, and of subjects, slaves. Surely it is true, that this strange and potent Personage is a fallen Intelligence who once trod the heavens in all the firmness of conscious innocence, and glowed with an angel's love ; but who, through jealousy and pride, has proved unfaithful to his God : and that now, retaining somewhat of his former excellence and vigour, he is devoting himself to the task of rivalling his Maker, and defacing the workmanship of the Lord he has spurned. Oh ! needs there not, then, some Deliverer who shall cast down this ambitious Destroyer from his usurped eminence,—who shall spoil him of those weapons which he applies to a use so deadly, and preserve the frightened flock of mankind from that Wolf against whom they now appear so imperfectly guarded ?”

“ From the agency of that Evil One,” said Aruphon, “ much of man's misery is undoubtedly to be derived ; and it will be an important office of the Deliverer to defeat and destroy his influence. But it will not be sufficient that this Foe be vanquished, or even that evil be cast out of the heart of man, unless its place be supplied by holiness. For it appears to me, that, in order to amend the general departure from rectitude we have been deploring, we require some moral system that will repress the aberrations of the mind, not merely by prohibition and menace, but by filling it with images of beauty and truth. As sometimes in fording a river it is necessary to keep the eye steadily fixed on the opposite shore, lest the head become dizzy, and the rushing current carry us away ; so does it seem necessary that man, amid the temptations and difficulties of life, should keep his eye fixed on some great end, to which all his ener-

gies should be directed. But has he now any such end? Do not all his labours tend only to the accomplishment of ignoble designs,—of petty pursuits altogether unworthy of his nature? He is gifted with mighty powers and passions: but they are desecrated by the uses to which they are applied. They produce the warrior, the orator, the statesman; and to such the multitude are content to yield a reverence approaching to worship. In the loftiest seat in the temple of fame men have placed the victorious warrior. Their laws, it is true, punish the private assassin: yet the titled murderer is met with plaudits, and adored as a god. And in the inferior grades of ambition, it is the man whose pursuits after honour, or riches, or voluptuousness, are attended with *success*, (however base may be the means by which that success has been secured,) to whom the high places of the earth are awarded. The child of fortune, not the child of virtue, is the favourite of the world. But the character which alone really merits our esteem,—the man who sacrifices to virtue the wreath of fame and the roses of pleasure,—who, folding himself in the mantle of humility, devotes himself to the welfare of others, thinking no day well-spent that does not leave after it the memory of some misery softened or some good effected,—such an one is passed by with contempt, and deemed unworthy of any permanent station in the world's regard. The just man often goes down in sorrow and ignominy to his grave, and we hear no voice authoritatively assuring us that he has not lost his reward. To detect this error requires but little reflection or experience: it is open and palpable; but the remedy is uncertain and concealed."

"And from our guilt and ignorance," said Hurmon,

“spring doubt and fear. The unseen world is either banished altogether from our minds, or awakens only ideas of terror. As clouds hanging in the sky, increase the apparent height of the firmament seen, at intervals, above them; so do our uncertainty and apprehension seem, at times, to remove the high heaven of immortality far above our most earnest strivings and wildest hopes. Hence arise those fearful thoughts we cannot avoid entertaining of death: for as, while wandering beneath a midnight sky, our fancy peoples the darkness with ghastly shapes; so the path to the sepulchre appears to us haunted with spectres, because of the obscurity enveloping it. Sometimes, indeed, we venture to look out into the misty Future; but we soon shrink back from the contemplation: for we see hideous forms stealing across the gloom, and hear strange voices whispering in the heavy air. And when we roam amid nature’s retirements, often does our guilt-burdened imagination persuade us that unearthly ministers of vengeance frequent them; and instead of delighting to find ourselves in solitude, where we might hold uninterrupted converse with the world of spirits, and gaze, as it were, on the face of God, we are glad to get back again to the habitations of man, and seek safety from our own thoughts in the society of our fellows. And when we have abandoned some beloved friend to the sharp beaks of the birds of heaven, do we not move away from the sepulchre in dejection; nay, almost in despair? We mourn that the departed is no longer the associate of our walks and studies; and we ask ourselves, ‘Where is he? Is that bright eye which we once beheld glistening with tenderness to be opened no more? Has that voice, which breathed music and eloquence, died

into an echo never more to be awakened? Has that intellect, which knew the nature of every tree of the forest,—which calculated the courses of the stars, and suffered not the light breeze to pass unquestioned,—that spirit which glowed with love, or melted with pity, or panted with hope, been suffered to expire for ever,—to pass away like the fragrance of flowers or the tones of a lyre? Was the soul, that bright and living fire, kindled only that it might expend its powerful flame on pernicious or useless objects,—to be a firebrand rather than a lamp,—to resemble the lightning rather than the sun, and then to be left to sink and perish in its own smoke? But we ask in vain: for no voice comes from beyond the tomb's dark barrier to answer our perplexing enquiries."

"We are told, indeed," said Aruphon, "that philosophy is a remedy for all our moral diseases; but philosophy only improves the intellect; it does not renew and purify the heart. It may shew man the narrowness of his prison-house; but it does not tell him how he may escape from it. It may, it is true, produce some outward improvement, specious to the eye: but it leaves a deadly disease festering within. It may, so to speak, call forth a landscape covered with verdure: but its luxuriance will be that of the marsh, not of the meadow; and its productions will be weeds instead of flowers. We require the passions to be chastened: it is not sufficient that the understanding be improved."

"But," said Tachshesh, "does not philosophy reveal to us the being of a God? Does it not teach us to trace His pencilling in the flower, and to hear His voice in the wind and the thunder? The more perseveringly we pry into the concealments of nature, the more glorious

and perspicuous are the marks we discover of an Omnipotent hand ;—the more deeply we dive into the ocean of being, the more lustrous are the pearls of truth we bring up from its depths. And if, at times, we are tempted to stop short at the creature, and render to it the homage due only to God, it is because we overlook the testimony graven on the forehead of every created thing, declaring that it is but the workmanship and servant of the Creator. The most august creations of His power, would, perhaps, be the most ready to render Him the homage which is His due. A young poet of our city, adopting the style of the Zendavesta, has, in the following allegory, represented the four Elements acknowledging before Zoroaster their inferiority and subserviency to God :—

“ Zoroaster had chosen for his abode a cave* amid the Elburz mountains : in it flowers grew and fountains bubbled : and he consecrated it to the Creator and Father of all. The cave was to him an emblem of the earth’s curious and complex fabric : and he had so disposed its interior by symmetrical arrangements that it contained a symbolical representation of the elements and climates of the world. At the mouth of this cave he was one day sitting, plunged in deep thought, when an angel, sent from before the burning throne of Ormuzd, appeared unto him and said :—‘ What wilt thou that I should do for thee ?’ And the prophet answered, ‘ Call up before me the Spirits of the Elements.’ Then the Angel called, and they appeared.

“ First leaped forth the Spirit of the Fire. He had cast a veil over his unapproachable splendour, that the eye of a mortal might endure the blaze. On his brow

* See Porphyry. de Antro Nymph.

shone a glowing gem, which, in shape, was a mimic sun, and shot forth rays of living light : his robes, scarcely concealing the glory bursting out around them, assumed the appearance of snow, gilded by the sunlight. His eyes were vivid and restless : and wings, like two fiery-tressed meteors, fluttered on his shoulders. And the Prophet said : ' Whence comest thou ? ' And the Fire replied, ' I come from the Fountain of the Sun,* where I have taken of the light, which is there ever flowing into an urn of gold, and I have borne the precious stream over the universe. I have conveyed it to the moon, and she has renewed her waning diadem with the beam. I have carried it to the stars, and they bowed their fair crowns with gratitude as they received of the life-giving brightness. I have wandered, too, among men, and committed my treasure to their hands ; and I have sighed to behold my choicest gifts arising from idolatrous altars, or spreading desolation through palaces and cities. But I have smiled to see the flowers spring up beneath my influence, opening their lustrous eyes, and looking towards the sun from whose countenance they drew life and loveliness. I have rejoiced to see the poor, cold traveller in far-off climes, standing by the wood he had kindled, and forgetting his past hardships as he felt the genial influence of the fire.' ' Oh beneficent Spirit ! ' exclaimed Zoroaster : ' art thou, then, God ? ' And the Spirit of the Fire replied, ' I am not : I am but His shadow, though I am permitted to sit on the steps of His throne.' And he passed away.

" Then the Spirit of the Air stood before the sage. A delicious perfume floated around the Prophet, and the murmur of faint, sweet music met his ear. The

* " Fountain of the Sun " was an ancient Persian epithet of the solar disk.

form of the Spirit was transparent, like the shapes that may be traced amid the clouds, or like the thin outline of a waning rainbow. Her garments seemed formed of threads of light, and the clear, blue sky was distinctly seen through them. And Zoroaster asked, 'Whence comest thou?' And she said, 'I come from passing to and fro the earth. I give to every man the breath of life. I support the flowers in their stateliness and glory, renewing their faded colours and wafting their odours afar. I convey to mortals the sounds of melody; and the birds welcome me with song as I sport in the tops of the trees. I summon the winds and refresh the surface of the earth. I sweep the bosom of the ocean who thunders beneath my touch; and, filling the sails of the ships, I speed them on their way. I float on the murmuring rivers, and kiss the woodland pool till it breaks into smiles. I waft to heaven the incense of adoration; but with sighs have I been compelled to convey thither the cry of misery, the shout of impiety, and the impure song of superstition. I sit by the sick-man's couch; and cooling his feverish brow with my breath, I bring back to him strength and hope. I creep with timid step into the burning wilds, and cheer the heart of the fainting wanderer. I soar to the wide vault of the sky, and bid the lazy clouds scatter their cooling showers on the earth.' 'Art *thou*, then, God, O gentle Spirit?' asked the holy man. 'I am not,' she replied: 'I am not worthy to be the breath of His mouth:' and she floated away like an expiring echo.

"Then came the Spirit of the Earth. She was a female form of majestic beauty. Her countenance wore a kind and maternal expression. Her brow was wreathed with the likeness of leaves: round her neck hung a

garland of flowers : her robe was of many colours, and she held some ears of corn in her hand. Once more the Prophet asked, 'And whence comest thou?' And, with a voice clear and soft as the song of birds, she replied: 'I have been erecting dwellings for the shelter of man. I have spread groves over his head ;—I have scattered flowers at his feet ;—I have supplied him with corn, wine, and oil. My caverns yield a refuge for the beasts ; and the birds build their nests in my trees. I have provided leafy solitudes for the meditative sage : and from my stores are dug the clay with which man frames his houses ; and the marble and stone with which he builds his proud palaces and towers. Mine is the diadem that glitters on the brow of the king ; and mine the gem that adorns the maiden's shining tresses or snowy neck. From me man gains, during life, sustenance and a home ; and after death his body mingles with my element whence it was taken at the first.' And again the Prophet asked, 'Art thou God?' And she said :—'I am not : my dominions are but the footstool of His feet ;' and departed.

"Then the Spirit of the Water stood before the Wise Man. She was a stately and beautiful shape : on her brow was a coronal of pearls : her robes, resplendent as crystal, assumed a frequent change of colour, like the spray of a torrent beneath the rays of the sun : and she was surrounded by vapour of a golden hue. Tears stood in her eyes ; but they were tears of joy, and her long locks were filled with drops of dew. The Sage repeated his question, 'Whence comest thou?' And she said, 'I have been refreshing the weary limb and the parched lip. I have been wiping off the dust and drought from the drooping flowers and the pallid grass. Mounted in the

chariot of the clouds I have been borne from place to place, to descend in soft showers on the withering landscape. I have cleft the dry ground, and the welcome rill has gushed forth. I have guided rivers over the earth, which I have covered with plenty and beauty. I have diffused the immensity of ocean beneath the eye of the firmament, which looks down lovingly upon the waves as they blush beneath the kisses of the sun, or reflect the bright countenances of the broad moon and the meek stars. The flocks and herds drink of my life-giving waters, and the insects sip the shining drops that I hang upon the leaves.' 'Art *thou*, then, God?' asked the Prophet. 'I am not,' she replied: 'I am but the mirror of His majesty.' And she melted away like the noiseless step of a gentle stream.

"Then the Angel said to Zoroaster: 'Art thou satisfied?' And the Prophet said; 'Canst thou shew me God?' And the Angel answered; 'No! Can the eye of a mortal gaze undazzled on the midday sun? Can a man play with the lightning and be unscathed? The Elements are but the instruments of the will of the Supreme: opposite in their nature and tendency, they nevertheless harmoniously combine to set forth His glory, and to further the happiness of His creatures. There is but one God: reverently worship Him; and though thou canst not see Him now, He shall be revealed to thee by the angel of death.'"

A pause in our travellers' conversation here ensued: an awful impression of the majesty of the Supreme filled their minds: their imagination, having rapidly scanned His works, sought to intrude even into His pavilion; but it was driven back baffled and disgraced: and they

felt how very meagre and inadequate are man's loftiest conceptions of his Maker.

"Philosophy and reason," Aruphon at length replied, "may demonstrate to us that there must be a God; but what avails it that you can prove to me His being, if you leave me still unconscious how I may gain His favour, or, indeed, whether He cares for me at all? If the revelation about to be made to us should conduct to this,—if we should come back convinced, not merely of the power, but also of the tenderness of our Creator, how richly will our toils and perils be repaid! How delightful to be awakened from our long sleep of ignorance by a voice from heaven, and to discover in that voice the accents of infinite love. For, convince me that God is not an unconcerned spectator of my errors and calamities,—that He feels for me the love of a Father and the compassion of a Friend,—and then it will matter little to me that disease should agonize my frame, or poverty cover me with degradation. I shall not then be solicitous to know whether the path of life is to be strewed with flowers or choked with thorns: it will be sufficient if I can but feel that His hand is guiding me, and that my wanderings will terminate at His feet. Were my home to be in the sandy desert, the consciousness of His presence would clothe it with verdure: while confiding in His tenderness, the wings of the red lightning* would hover harmlessly above me, for the thunders of the storm would not drown the whispers of His love. Conducted by His hand through life's winding path, I should be led from the abyss to the plain,—from the vale to the mountain-top: I should be led from despair to hope,—from earth to heaven:

* *Rubri torsisset fulminis alas.* Claudian. *Rap. Pros.*

and having gained the lofty eminence of immortality, I should be able to look back on the dangers I had passed and the combats I had won, and discover how all had tended to one great end,—the glory of His majesty, and the welfare of myself. If I possessed this conviction, I could resign myself without a murmur to the silence and corruption of the tomb; for I should know that though, like the seed cast into the earth, I might mingle with the clay; yet it would only be so that I might spring up, a tall and fruitful plant, to flourish for ever beneath the sunshine of God's approbation."

"But, in truth," he continued, "it is a consciousness of transgression that has put man at an immeasurable distance from this holy confidence. Sorrow is not the heaviest burden man is doomed to bear. He may be pressed to the earth by grief,—he may be spoiled of his possessions and freedom,—he may be subjected to contumely or torture by the tyranny of superior force: but if there be still within him a consciousness of virtue, the elasticity of his spirit will keep him from despair. But let the man know that he has sinned, and that on *that* account misery has overtaken him,—let him see that his fetters have been twined by his own hands,—let him be the victim of unavailing repentance and galling remorse, and then the mists of despair begin to gather thickly around him. He feels that his crimes have deserved and aroused the wrath of God; but he knows not whence pardon is to be sought; and the only method he can devise of blotting awhile from his memory the horrors of the past, is to plunge yet more deeply into those very excesses which have occasioned his misery. If, then, in the ears of such an one a whisper of hope

could be breathed ;—oh ! if we were to be assured (for, my brethren, do not *we* also mourn under the tyranny of sin) that an expiation was to be offered, and to us forgiveness was to be granted, would not the annunciation be as life from the dead ? Since I know that God must be a good and holy being, how can I, conscious as I am of frailty and guilt, presume to stand without terror before him ? How can I ask favour at the hands of One whom my sins must have grievously offended, when I know not how reconciliation with Him can be brought about ? This is, indeed, a truth very necessary for our permanent tranquillity. For let the most abandoned wretch upon earth, one stained with blood and pallid with woe, be fully persuaded that his guilt is entirely forgiven, and methinks he will be won back again to hope,*—he will begin the race of life anew with alacrity and confidence, and be ready to take his place among his fellow-men, girded and armed for deeds of virtue. The full conviction that some mighty and generous being stood between us and the anger of heaven, to turn away from us punishment and to secure us forgiveness, would indeed be the most cheering revelation that could possibly be made to mankind. It would strike at the very root of moral evil. It would suffice to banish sorrow and excite happiness. It would rekindle the extinguished lamp of the heart, and throw an additional lustre over every event of life. What ! my brethren, if the Being whose advent we anticipate should assume and deserve the august title of **REDEEMER OF THE WORLD !**”

* Si l'on pouvait encore avoir quelque prise sur un tel caractère, ce serait en lui persuadant tout-à-coup, qu'il est absolument pardonné.—Mad. de Staël de l'Influence des Passions.

Here Aruphon ceased speaking, and the sun having arisen, the Magi hastened to bind on their girdles; and, after saluting the beneficent luminary, continued their journey.

CHAPTER III.

ONE evening the travellers had taken refuge for the night in the half-ruined caravanserai of a village, once populous, but now almost deserted. The wretched hovel afforded but little protection from the weather; yet it was as much as they needed, for it was a bright and serene night, and they desired no better roof than the jewelled canopy of heaven. The Magi had lain down side by side for repose: but as they gazed upon the sweet stars whose magic letters they had studied from their childhood, and which now seemed, in their brightness, to be sparks of fire scattered from some mighty altar placed on high amid the heavens, their souls became filled with glorious and pleasant thoughts which made sleep unwelcome. Their spiritual nature asserted its supremacy, and they passed some time in talk.

“I have often thought,” observed Hurmon, “that even from man’s present imperfect condition, we may gather hope of an improved state of being to be enjoyed hereafter,—that even amid the darkness of our moral night, may be discerned some streaks of light, crimsoning the horizon, and the breeze be felt which heralds the dawn. Does not our dissatisfaction with the pursuits of this life, shew that we are reserved for a better

mode of being? Man, in his present state, seems stunted and dwarfish. The inanimated productions of nature reach and maintain their maturity: the majestic tree, the towering mountain, the undying sun,—even the little flowers and the sparkling gem, are perfect in their kind. But it is not so with man. His frame is subject to diseases and agitated by passion, and he is ever looking forward to a perfection he cannot obtain. *Our* course of life, my brethren, has been devoted to duties and contemplations of the most sublime description: but even *we* have become fully convinced of the nothingness of our present existence; and we therefore conclude that, as we cannot have been created in mockery, we are destined for some loftier condition. And if from the unsatisfactory nature of *our* existence, passed in devotion and meditation, such an argument may be drawn, how much greater strength does it gain when applied to those who have lived in tumult and war, or the guilty frivolities of savage life? What avails it that we can image to ourselves the raptures of Paradise, if we dare not expect ever to reach it; and why should our lot be made to possess the additional bitterness of our having constantly before our eyes sunny landscapes and gilded palaces, which are never to be our home? Why should we spend so many years in learning the vanity of earthly pleasures, if those pleasures be all we are fated to enjoy? No, my brethren, let us hope that we shall live for ever—that, when the waters of death have passed over us, we shall arise, like the beetle of the Nile, to bask in the rays of an awakening sun. Or that, according to the old fable which declares that there is a draught of which if a man drink he shall become a god, death will be to us such a draught, invigorating the faculties,

illuminating the soul, and shedding an inconceivable glory around the regenerated being."

"The hope of which thou speakest, my brother," said Aruphon, "is, indeed, very consolatory. And occasionally there live among us individuals who are able to draw deep pleasure from such anticipations,—who, looking upon this world as the vestibule of heaven's gorgeous temple, find in the beauties of creation a peculiar interest, because they view them as types of a superior loveliness to come.* Of such a character was one who was very dear to me. His name was Pheruz: he was a companion of my childish sports and my youthful studies. From his boyhood he was of a reserved and thoughtful disposition, and shrunk with an instinctive aversion from the usual amusements of his age. The depths of the forest, the caverns of the rock, the secluded mountain-top—these were the haunts most congenial to his spirit. He seemed to have established an intimate fellowship between himself and the inanimate objects around: he could interpret nature's sounds into familiar voices; and every murmur of the stream,—every utterance of the breeze,—every roll of the thunder, spoke to him in accents which he fancied intelligible to himself alone. As he advanced from boyhood to youth, his singular temperament assumed a sublime character. He seemed to look through the wonders of creation for something lying beyond them: he had before been bound by the spell of beauty; but he now felt that there must be some Being by whom that spell was wrought; and he gave himself up to the study of nature's loveli-

* A mystical theology, similar to that referred to in this episode, has been professed immemorially by a numerous sect of Persians and Hindus. The modern philosophers of this persuasion are called Sufis.—See Sir W. Jones's Sixth Discourse before the Asiatic Society; Pocock's *Flowers of the East*, p. 15; and Fraser's *Persia*, p. 322.

ness with fresh zeal, since he had become anxious to discover the footsteps and dwelling-place of nature's God. I had always been the confidant of his lonely meditations. From my childhood I had been set apart for the sacred duties of the temple, and he looked with deep reverence on the person and functions of a priest, thinking that to those busied in holy ministrations, and standing near the burning altar, was vouchsafed some portion of the revelation he panted to know. Often, lighting suddenly upon him, I have found him standing lost in thought by the side of some flower of more than ordinary beauty, or listening to the babble of a stream; and he has welcomed me with eagerness, and we have wandered together amid some of those pleasant spots which would make earth a paradise, did they but contain a barrier against sin. And he would tell me how he thought that all nature seemed bursting with some mighty secret—how behind the material frame-work of the universe he believed there dwelt the unseen, but ever-active Cause of all. 'I ask not,' he would say, 'for the spangled imagery of a poetical mythology, which fills every portion of this lovely world with its separate deity. I could not bear to fritter away the vast conception which pervades my mind, by stooping to think that the sea, the forest, and the sky are crowded by numerous and opposing gods. No; I would have the various feelings which nature's beauties awaken, all to concentrate in one emotion, leading me to a simple and holy worship. I delight to perceive how her innumerable lines converge in one brilliant point,—how the various gradations of being become steps leading up to one lofty throne,—how on the countless forms of things below, there is the impress of One above.' And ardently did he long to

behold His countenance and hear His voice. He had fancied, he said, that the sun-light was the glance of His eye,—that the wind was the whisper of His voice; but there was a far brighter manifestation for which he sighed, and which he knew he must die to know. And at length a warm, though patient desire for death became the ruling passion of his soul,—‘like a lighted taper he shed burning tears waiting for the moment of extinction, as the means of returning to his Only Beloved.’* He would apply every object we met in our walks to that one great occupying idea. He would say, ‘Here amid the loveliest spots a sadness comes over me; for at the end of every landscape rises a dark barrier which I would, but cannot, pass. If I ask the flowers, ‘Where is God?’—they weep tears of dew, but reply not. If I ask the streams, they roll ripplingly to my feet, but answer not. The stars seem meet to form the pavement of heaven’s crystal† palaces: but they cannot guide me to Him who sitteth above them. The royal sun gives me a faint emblem of His presence: but, rising and setting in uniform regularity, he preserves a stern silence to my enquiries and prayers.’

“He gathered from tradition that there had been a time when God moved visibly among men; but that they had first disobeyed, and then hastened to forget Him—that scarcely had His voice, speaking to them in the familiar tones which a man uses to his friend, died into an echo, when they strove to sweep His name and worship from their memories: and on their altars, yet warm with the sacrifice which He had accepted, they laid the offerings of an alien and guilty devotion. And

* Sir W. Jones, ut supra.

† The Magi distinguish Paradise by the epithet “crystal.”

it was to punish men for their ingratitude, he said, that He no longer stood among them in visible manifestation. The works of nature seemed to him to retain a consciousness of having been blessed by His presence during some distant period of the past, and to be now mourning His departure: while man, ever unable to find any resting-place below, appeared to resemble some wandering star, which, fallen from its orbit, rolls on for ever without a destination or a home. 'But from the fact,' he would say, 'that I am able to feel after Him if haply I may find Him, I draw a hope that He will yet again be pleased to make a more evident revelation of himself. To some it may be granted now, but to all it will assuredly be made hereafter. I cannot trace around me any sign that this revelation will be made on earth; but I believe that I shall soon behold it in the sky. Come, death!' he used sometimes to exclaim, 'and bid the genii of the elements share my dissolved frame among them! and let the angel-judge* soon place his dazzling hand on my liberated spirit, and, telling me that I have added a deeper intensity even to celestial joy, conduct me in safety over the narrow bridge to the abodes of the wise and the pure. There, in some sheltered spot which sorrow cannot darken nor sin profane, shall I wait till the genii are summoned to resign their trust, and the portions of my body are combined once more, but in a more harmonious shape. Then shall I be sprinkled with the waters of life: beauty, like the blush of morn, shall bloom on my cheek: in holiness, as in a snowy vestment, shall I be arrayed; and, thus adorned, I shall be lifted to those heights which Ormuzd blesses with His brightest smiles; where I shall

* See Introduction, p. xiv.

stand before the burning altar of His presence for ever.'

"This was the burden of his hopes: nor was it long before they were, in appearance, fulfilled. A friend had built for him a small vessel to enable him to gratify his peculiar fondness for the water. Seated in this, he used to float along at the will of the current, and spend hours of dreamy meditation reclining in the boat. He often selected for these excursions a part of the stream which flowed between high banks crowned with tall, gloomy trees. It was a place which Melancholy seemed to have claimed for her own. Seldom was any living creature seen near it, except now and then a solitary bird which flitted hastily across as though anxious to reach a more genial resting-place; and whose sad, boding cry might be deemed the articulate voice of that stern solitude. Summer could but teach it to wear a faint, sickly smile: the blue sky looked dim and cloudless in that black mirror: for the lofty banks flung over it a deep shadow on the brightest days. But it was during a storm that you could best behold the sublime terrors of the spot,—when the rain streamed down the hills,—when the river was worked into waves like those of the sea,—when the wind shrieked as in despair,—when, among the huge clouds, death seemed to brood with horrible wings,—when the lightning shot across the gloom, and along the firmament rolled the chariot of the thunder. It was in some such season that the catastrophe I am about to mention occurred. For, in the evening of a day in autumn, in the earlier part of which our town had been visited by a fearful tempest, I walked out to enjoy the grateful calm that had followed, and went towards the river in hope that I might there meet with Pheruz, and make him the companion of my walk.

And as soon as I came within sight of the water I *did* find him there—a corpse! Yes, he has now learned the desired secret: his soul has, I cannot but believe, soared upwards to those starry places whereon he loved to gaze, or still hovers amid nature's solitudes, endued with loftier energy and prouder powers. It appeared that his boat had been overturned during the storm, and that he had struggled to the bank only to die. Long did I remain by his side, endeavouring to rekindle the light of life in his wan eyes. I removed the hair, now dank and stiff, from his forehead, whose marble purity even death had forborne to stain. I chafed his cold hands that now returned not my grasp as they had ever done before: nor did I abandon the melancholy task till long after the last ray of hope had faded from my heart. At length, taking him in my arms, I bore him to the town: and many were the tears shed for the thoughtful youth who had perished in his prime. But though I mourned the loss of my dearest companion,—though from my favourite haunts a glory had departed since I was compelled to tread them alone; yet did I endeavour to draw consolation from the hope that we have not parted for ever. For, however strongly reason may refuse to admit the belief of a life to come, the *heart* rejects, almost as sacrilege, the thought that those whom we have loved are dead to us for ever. Oh! for some voice from heaven which should stamp with its solemn sanction these yearnings of affection for a future reunion, and authoritatively rebuke those misgivings which, in our dark moments, *will* arise to make us fear that death is a barrier we can never overleap. And that voice, I believe, we shall soon hear: and I abandon myself to the confidence which has arisen within me.

No : I cannot think that my friend no longer exists : in some other form, in some place he still continues to live : and even now, as I gaze on the stars, I fancy that I can trace his countenance bending towards me, with its former looks of kindness, from the sky. Yes, we shall meet again : let us hope that it will be in some state of being into which sorrow cannot intrude, and where the flowers we place in our bosoms, are not matured merely for decay."

Aruphon here ceased ; nor did either of his brethren feel any inclination to reply : and at length, tired nature gaining the ascendancy, the Wise Men resigned themselves to sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the following day an opportunity was found to renew the conversation of the previous night; when Tachshesh began by saying:—

“Surely each of the faculties of the soul is an evidence of its immortality: for who can believe that attributes so noble were bestowed to be enjoyed only for the space of this transitory life? There is Memory, arresting objects which were floating down the stream of time, and causing them to remain immoveable, like rocks, at its side. There is Hope, pointing out to us the blush of morn amid the murkiest night; or lending us wings with which we may waft ourselves to gayer and more welcome scenes. There is Fear, stopping us in our purposed design by a touch, whose chill is felt in our every vein, or revealing to the conscious criminal, in the loneliest spot, the avenger of his guilt. There is Love, shewing us comeliness in the face of deformity, or nerving us to bear anguish and pardon injury for the sake of the being with whom our affections have found a home. And, then, there is the Imagination, which rivals and perhaps exceeds nature herself in the prodigality of its colouring and the symmetry of its creations, making use of sights and sounds, tangible by sense, in order to produce others still more fair. Bursting asunder the adamantine gates of impossibility,* it rushes

* Sprengten der Unmöglichkeit diamantne Pforten.—F. von Matthiäson.

forth into the limitless ether, and follows the courses of the stars; or, hasting across the immensity of ocean, takes up its abode in the pavilion of the setting sun. It can place itself on the bow of heaven, and commune with the spirits who make it their pathway to earth. It rebuilds the ruins of time, and marshals the fallen fabrics of cities in their ancient stateliness. And more: with an adoring boldness it puts aside the curtain of the sky, and looks, or seems to look, on the marvels hidden behind it. Tell the child of genius of the grandeur of palaces, of the jewelry of crowns, or of the lengthened pomp of triumphal processions, and he will not be dazzled by the relation: for he needs but to retire into the chambers of his imagination, and twine the flowers, gather up the gems, and mingle the colours there provided for him; and he can shape out to himself edifices and prospects which throw earth's mightiest marvels into the shade. Place him in the crowd of a great city, and he can, if he please, bring around him the still haunts of the glen and forest: or place him amid the parched desert, and in fancy he can wander by smiling rivers, or repose beneath the dewy canopy of the grove. Much are our spiritual powers to be prized for the splendour and energy they give to our present life: but still more for their prophetic manifestations of a glory to come."

"Yes," said Hurmon, "and the vivid pictures of poetry, imagination's fairest daughter, go far to prove that the soul cannot die. The poet gazes on the same world as others: but to him every object becomes a symbol of some majestic truth. From all he sees he forms a marvellous language, in which he endeavours to express those visions of beauty and perfection which

gild the recesses of his soul. He has gained the power of reading the hearts of his fellow men from the study of his own: he tracks vice to its hiding-places, and clothes virtue in the robes of her proper excellence. He seems to have dived into the bosom of the earth, or looked across the barrier of the firmament, and there seen things invisible to common eyes. He appears in all ages to have moved among men, as one who had received from heaven a commission to instruct and dignify his fellows,—to elevate their grovelling ambition,—to win them from mercenary pursuits, and to prepare them, in some measure, for the employments of eternity. And though he may often have degraded his office, and permitted the music of his harp to be desecrated by the accompaniments of vice and folly; still the sublimity of his communications tells of the heights to which he has soared; and his words melt into a harmony which Heaven only can teach. For I believe that his inspiration is not originally derived from the varied loveliness of nature, much as he delights to commune with her; nor yet from the passions and deeds of men, inscribed on the tablet of his observant experience: but from the Supreme Intelligence Himself. From Him are derived that genius which discovers vacancy to be peopled with moving shapes, and traces foot-prints amid the impalpable paths of darkness:—and that wisdom which can discourse so truly and eloquently of life and death,—of hope and fear,—and of all the mighty marvels of chance and time. I endeavoured some years ago, to illustrate this idea in a fanciful narrative, called ‘The History of a Beautiful Thought,’ in which I have endued with speech a mental conception, and supposed it to be the narrative of its own adventures. As it is

not altogether inappropriate to our discussion, I will venture to repeat it :—

“ ‘Ormuzd sat on his throne, which glowed in the midst of heaven. Around him were gathered his attendant spirits basking in his ray, and waiting in meek adoration some expression of his will. From a distant part of space came forth an angel to announce that a commission which had been entrusted to him, was performed. Filled with gratitude that the Great King should have selected him to be the instrument of his exalted designs, he took his place amid the glittering ranks, and cast a longing look towards the throne. Then was I, a Beautiful Thought, sent forth from the Source of light and loveliness unto this angel, who, with folded wings, stood silently drinking in the stream of knowledge and beauty, ever flowing from above. He received me with eager joy,—gazed on me with celestial pleasure; and then, bending in a still deeper humility before the throne, remained long lost in contemplation of the glorious idea which was filling his capacious mind.

“ ‘By that angel I was carried to earth. He had been appointed the guardian of a mortal babe; and with him I hovered above the sleeping-place of his guileless charge. There lay the sweet infant imbedded in its snowy pillow: by its side sat the mother, glowing with nature’s deepest and best emotions, and striving to trace in her child’s face the features of its sire. I took up my abode in that infant’s spirit. A shade of mysterious pensiveness rapidly crossed its brow: and then it opened its clear eyes, looked ardently at its mother, and tossing its little arms aloft, laughed loudly and merrily. The mother imagined that it was pleased with a flower which

she was holding in her hand: she shook it before the child; and it seemed to think so too, for it grasped at it with eagerness, and pressed it to its rosy lips.

“‘I soon left my new dwelling: for I had now tasted of that essence of restlessness ever mingled with the atmosphere of earth. As I passed along I beheld a peasant, who was busied with others in some agricultural employment. I entered into his spirit: he seemed pleased at my approach; and, after pausing awhile in his labour, muttered a few words to his companions: but they did not understand him: neither did he understand himself: so he went on again with his task, and I was forgotten.

“‘I entered into the bosom of a voluptuary; but I there found myself mingled with such strange and unseemly companions, that I speedily quitted so unhalloed a place.

“‘I hovered for a while over the brain of a merchant; but I found him agitated with haste and anxiety: his attention was so fixed on his traffic, that I cared not to intrude where I saw I should be an unwelcome guest.

“‘I now began to lament that I had ever been borne from my celestial birthplace. I wondered for what end I could have been sent to earth: for it seemed that I could find no befitting welcome in the spirits of its inhabitants. Floating mournfully along, I, at length, reached a lonely house standing in the midst of a luxuriant landscape. There were no marks of wealth about the dwelling; but the elegance of its arrangements indicated the presence of a superior mind. In a retired chamber of that house, was seated an aged man. Many volumes were by his side: and before him lay a manuscript in which his attention was absorbed. He gazed

awhile on vacancy, and then looked upwards to the sparkling sky, and downwards over the smiling fields, seeming as though he sought some recollection or idea which obstinately evaded his grasp. Into his soul I softly glided as into an abode prepared for my reception. He immediately started with joy as though he had just found a costly treasure: and after he had written something very rapidly on the scroll before him, I discovered that he had there traced my form in correct and beautiful verse. His poem was at length completed, and went forth to the world: many portions of it were vehemently applauded: I recognized in it the countenances of several of my kindred: and the part which I had inspired, was the most admired of the whole.

“‘Since that period I have been drawn, as it were by a spell, to accompany the magic pages of the poet into distant lands. And if anything could reconcile me to my exile from heaven, it would be the good I have performed during my wanderings over the earth. I have visited the sorrowful man in his affliction, and his tears have been restrained in my presence. I have sat with the captive in his dungeon, and to him the rays of the morning sun, gilding the bars of his cell, have been less grateful than my approach. I have hovered over the dying man’s couch, and he has been quickened by my touch.* I have met the sentimentalist in his lonely walk, and have taught him to love the substance as well as the name of virtue. I have accompanied the sage to his sublime retirement, and have assisted him in his difficult pursuit of truth. I have stood beside the orator in the national council, and lent my aid to sup-

* “‘Give me,’ said Herder to his son, as he lay in the parched weariness of his last illness, ‘give me a *great thought*, that I may quicken myself with it.’”—Jean Paul. Reeve and Taylor’s Translations, p. 1.

port true liberty, and hush the clamours of sedition. Far and wide have been my wanderings over this wondrous creation; nor shall I depart hence while there is sorrow to be softened, or genius to be awakened: and, at last, I shall be called back to the heaven whence I came,* and be openly acknowledged to have drawn my existence from the King of the world.' ”

“Undoubtedly,” said Aruphon, “the creations of poetry prove the soul’s immortality: but I think the imperfect state in which they are now presented to us, affords a still higher proof of it. Eagerly do we listen to the song of the poet; yet it is but a small portion of his feelings that he is able to express: many a sweet sound passes by him ere he can fix it in words; and he will confess, that, in his most successful productions, he has not described one half of the ideal loveliness that floated before him. May we not, then, anticipate the time when this imperfection shall be done away? How glorious would be that condition of being in which the mind could tell out *all* its conceptions; and in which soul might mingle with soul in ineffable and perfect communion, without the embarrassing medium of language!† Let us hope that some such state may be reserved for man; and that one of the final triumphs of Goodness will be to strip off the covering which hides mind from mind, so that the whole multitude of the Blessed may share unreservedly each others joy, and be blended in a sympathy which no misconception shall disturb.”

* Nos derniers soupirs seront peut-être comme une noble pensée qui remonte vers le ciel.—Mad. de Staël. De l’Allemagne, *ad fin.*

† See “Physical Theory of another Life,” c. viii.

CHAPTER V.

IT was not to be expected that the Magi could thus proceed in search of a Being whom their belief had clothed with pretensions so lofty, without entertaining within themselves some idea of the form in which he would at last present himself to them. In their own minds, perhaps, this wonderful personage had from the first assumed some tangible shape: but, at length, they compared their opinions on the subject. Aruphon commenced the conversation by asking:—

“What image, my brethren, has your fancy formed of the King whom we expect to find? We know that it is not for us to dive too deeply into that ocean wherein lie concealed the mysteries of the Great King. The sun, His mightiest symbol, fills the earth with his goodness, painting the flowers, maturing the fruit, and flinging a rich vesture over the delighted sea: but, good as he is, we dare not gaze too fixedly upon him lest our presumption be punished by bewilderment and blindness. If, then, we cannot lift up our eyes in the presence of the servant, how shall we sustain the glory of the master? Yet it cannot be unwarrantable boldness to meditate on the attributes of the Being we worship. Though we cannot gaze unpunished on the meridian sun; yet do we trace the wide workings of his influence,

and bask, with gladdened hearts, in his ray. So we may strive to follow out the providence of the Supreme; and ask ourselves by what means His beneficence will most probably choose to work."

"Thou speakest truly," replied Hurmon, "for I cannot think *that* to be a duty, which the good man would find it impossible to perform. Since, how can I shut out from my mind the idea of that Being who made me and every thing I behold;—who breathed into my frame the very life I feel stirring within me;—by whom the guiding light of reason was kindled in my soul, and to whom I owe every blessing that animates my existence? How can I, unless stupified or callous, prevent myself from thinking of so good a Being? The wise and virtuous mind loves to lose itself in the mysteries* of the Divine Nature,—loves to wander amid wilds marked by no mortal footprint, and to sail on oceans bounded only by the sky. But thou didst ask, O Aruphon! under what figure I imagined we should meet this glorious Personage. Surely He will come before us *as a King*, clothed in all that earth can furnish of pomp and majesty: for, if ever heavenly natures stoop to our lower sphere at all, it can only be to its loftiest stations. And, indeed, among the Jews a general expectation has long prevailed, that a wonderful King will very shortly appear to establish a universal empire, of which their beloved Jerusalem is to be the metropolis:—that every other kingdom will be subjected to Judæa, and that then those nations who have persecuted the Jews, will be fearfully punished, while those who have favoured them, will be permitted to share in the rewards

* "I love to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an *O altitudo!*"—Sir Thomas Browne.

and triumphs reserved for the children of Abraham. How true this may be I, of course, cannot tell. But I must say, O my brethren, that I have imaged to myself, in the object of our search, a Being in whose hand shall be the sceptre of power, and around whom shall be assembled a pomp more gorgeous than regal court ever before displayed. Surely, triumphant armies will gather submissively at his gates: genius will work marvels at his bidding: wealth will shed its stores at his feet: and from every side will arise the shouts of grateful applause, paid to his beneficence by a numerous and happy population."

"The picture you have drawn, O Hurmon," said Tachshesh, "would, perhaps, be pleasing to those apt to be dazzled with the specious appearance of outward splendour. But surely the Coming One is God: the symbol we have seen assures us of this: for, from the earliest times, a star has denoted God.* And since this August One is of Divine origin, can the things of which thou hast spoken,—the flush of triumph,—the obedience of armies,—the magnificence of royal state,—the plaudits of the multitude,—can these things be such as would delight one accustomed to the glory with which the Great King is surrounded in His own habitation? And if God were to seek out for Himself a state of life in which He might teach man virtue and wisdom, can we think that it would be to a royal court that He would repair? I reverence the character of a king: I respect the office which is ordained of God: but I cannot think that the Supreme will assume the guise of an earthly ruler. Surely when He shall appear all ranks will be blended: all the petty distinctions between

* See Bishop Warburton's Div. Leg. V. 2, p. 61.

man and man, will be merged in the vast distance that lies between man and God: royalty and poverty will stand side by side before the Omnipotent: and the individual, stripped of all adventitious ornaments, will appear clothed only in his own virtues. And *then*, my brethren, what character, think you, will seem the most sublime? It will not, I think, be the man whose proudest ambition has aspired only to reduce to his dominion creatures like himself,—to read the history of his victories in the trembling countenances of numerous vassals, and to crush beneath his triumphal car the souls and bodies of wretched multitudes: but it will rather be the man who has devoted himself to the pursuit of wisdom and the practice of virtue,—who has mingled with his fellow men only to bless them,—whose intellectual vision has remained fixed in longing expectation on the veiled countenance of God,—who has lived listening for His voice, sighing for His presence, and waiting to be united to Him. No; I cannot see such superiority in the rank of an earthly king as to think that God will make it the medium of His visible presence. Surely He will come among us in His own glory, *as God*, and not as man. He will be mantled in His own beauty, and not in the tinsel robes of human authority. For, what, at the best, is earth's proudest pageantry? When the successful hero has terminated his race,—when the baubles he has so eagerly pursued, glitter in his grasp,—when the robes of universal empire, so long coveted by him, float around his form,—the end must nevertheless at length come. And then, when the splendid solemnities by which man fondly tries to conceal the disgrace, and beautify the corruption of those he is pleased to honour, are concluded, and the mausoleum

has received its lordly guest, what remains, O king! of all the pomp that once surrounded thee? Do the dead arise to greet thee with honorable welcome? Does corruption fear to lay its hand on thy gorgeously-apparelled corpse? O no! Death has laid thy now crownless head as low as that of thy most scorned slave; and thou, in thy turn, art become the subject of a mightier monarch than thyself.

“How often, my brethren,” he continued, “have we lamented the extent and variety of suffering which mark every condition of mankind! In the palace there are the loathing of sated passion, and the outbreaks of tyrannical caprice. In the cottage there are want and sickness, and the continual repinings of reluctant submission. The prosperity of those denominated happy, is built on the downfall of others; and the proudest monument foolish man can raise to his glory, is a trophy won from the misery of his fellow men, if not from his own. The glory of the conqueror finds a befitting memorial in the pyramid of human skulls which he has sometimes delighted to erect. The pursuits of ordinary life disappoint us, as well by their frustration as by their success: we pine to gain a purpose which is found worthless when gained. Still is there within us a restless craving for something we do not possess, and cannot define: and from day to day we go on, ever hoping that, at least, the morrow will bring us some change for the better,—that, at least, the scheme on which we are *now* engaged, will be crowned with a satisfying success:—but, alas! the fountain that bubbles up so brightly before us, sinks into the earth even while we gaze upon it; and the flower that we have plucked, loses its bloom ere we have ceased press-

ing it to our lips. No, brethren, I cannot believe that the Expected One will appear as a man, though that man should be the loftiest on earth. He must appear *as a God*. To be a man is to be a weak and unhappy being—to be human, is to suffer.”

“And why,” exclaimed Aruphon with earnestness, “why may not the very end of His advent be *to suffer*? Can we conceive a grander idea of this illustrious stranger than that which would represent Him as One who shall come among us, sinless, but yet clothed in flesh, and accompanied by infirmities like our own,—who shall move amid earth’s thronging multitudes, not a being too high for sorrow, and therefore too exalted for sympathy with the sorrowful; but one who shall drink of our cup, though it be the cup of misery; and eat of our bread, though it be the bread of bitterness? *Thus* does it appear to me that He will come among us. His sufferings and humiliation being not the consequence of His own sins, but voluntarily assumed that He might be able to lift man from his degradation, and prepare for his calamity a shelter, will be to *Him* only the trophies of victory, not the elements of disgrace. He will drink of the poison-cup; but it will be to prepare the antidote: He will contend in the battle-field; but it will be to produce, and perpetuate peace. The conception of Deity thus arrayed in human form, (which I have gathered from an ancient prophecy of the Jews,*) stooping to humiliation,—mingling with the creatures He has formed,—yes, and, perhaps, enduring at their hands contumely and death,—reaching, as it does, to a sublimity above human comprehension, appears to me, on that account, not unworthy to be the offspring

* Isaiah, c. liii.

of the Divine mind. When God appears among us, it will not be to dazzle mankind with the glare of pomp and victory, by which they are already bewildered. It will rather be to work out their cure by pursuing an entirely different course,—by setting forth the graces of humility and meekness, and shewing that man's true triumph is the conquest of himself. Imagine, then, *God Himself in the likeness of man*, mingling with the miserable, dejected creatures of this fallen world,—imagine Him associating with them in their most retired haunts,—in their domestic privacy,—in their social conversations,—hearing from their own lips their tales of sorrow, and whispering, in His turn, the accents of consolation,—beholding, nay, touching their wounds and infirmities, and imparting healing by the touch ;—imagine Him declaring to the ignorant the wisdom of His own heaven, patiently hearing and answering their objections, and bringing into His service all that they had previously known or hoped or feared, commencing with the very elements of moral and natural science, and so leading them by degrees from the well-known to the unknown, from the valley to the mountain, from the obscure light of earth to the full effulgence of heaven, for the purpose of setting forth to them those mysteries which they otherwise could not understand, but which it was designed they should know. We, my brethren," he added, "have passed our lives in inquiries after truth,—we have sought it by keen observation of the words and doings of busy men,—we have sought it in the solitudes of nature, in meditation on the written records of the past, and in friendly conversation with each other ; and from these sources much, perhaps, of knowledge we have gained : but the best use of all our

knowledge, is, that it has taught us how little we really know. There is some mighty mystery still unrevealed. We go to behold its solution. And the darkness which envelopes our ideas of the mighty Being who made us,—after whom we can at present only follow timidly and irresolutely, like blind men in a difficult path,—of the spiritual world to which we are hastening, and of the method whereby we may reconcile to us that Holy One whose anger we fear our iniquities must have incurred, is so palpable and painful, that it well becomes us to rejoice deeply that we are permitted to entertain even a *hope* of its dispersion.”

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER a tedious journey, which various causes had protracted through several months, they reached Ecbatana. They arrived at that capital about the middle of the day, and were glad to seek shelter within its walls from the intense heat of the sun. They first paid their devotions at a temple, the sacred fire of which, fed from a spring of naphtha,* issuing from the soil, awakened peculiar respect. They then sought out a lodging-place in a retired part of the city, and enjoyed some hours of much-needed repose.

Towards the close of the day, having left directions with their attendants to provide such necessities as might be required in the future progress of their travels, they walked forth to enjoy the calm and coolness of the evening. They cared not to penetrate into the interior of the city,—to visit the royal mausoleum, a lofty tower, said to have been built by the prophet Daniel, the stately walls of which had preserved their majesty unwithered by the lapse of centuries;†—or even to enter the summer palace of the reigning monarch, though its tapestried halls,—supported by marble pillars, richly sculptured and of the purest white, and paved with

* Plutarch (*Life of Alexander*) mentions the naphtha springs of Ecbatana.

† Josephus. *Ant.* x. 11, § 7.

stones of various colours curiously inwrought, amid which paraded groups of sceptred noblemen, and other courtiers in their gorgeous dresses, from the proud Satrap, who almost challenged equality with royalty, down to the humble officer who basked in the sunshine of the court,—might have presented a spectacle well adapted to engage the attention of persons less absorbed in their own reflections than were our travellers. But their thoughts were occupied by an object before which all human splendour disappeared; and, besides, they were unwilling that their feelings should be pained by the sight of the idolatrous temples, and statues of deified kings with which the ruling dynasty had polluted the religion of Zoroaster. They shunned, therefore, all intercourse with the inhabitants, and, passing out at one of the gates of the city, left its proud towers behind them, and directed their steps towards the open country.

The immediate vicinity of the outer wall presented an animated scene. On one side they saw noble warriors passing to and fro on their fleet and elegant horses, or engaged in mock combats with the spear; while at another spot, troops of boys, their faces glowing with health and pleasure, were shooting arrows at a mark. Turning in another direction, they found a company of girls dancing round a fountain, their long hair, with its tasteful ornaments, sporting in the breeze; while others, seated in an alcove, were weaving garlands of flowers. They soon passed away from these scenes of active life, and proceeded till they reached a glen lying between the gardens skirting the capital and the mountains that rose beyond. Though scarcely out of the reach of human sounds, yet the spot in which they stood, wore an aspect of such perfect desertion, that they might

have imagined themselves many miles from the habitations of man. The grass, watered by a stream, passing through the midst, was unusually fresh and verdant: field-flowers were scattered in abundance: and they frequently stopped to gaze on roses and lilies, flourishing in spontaneous profusion, to which the hand of cultivation could scarcely have given an additional grace. As they passed along, many sweet birds had delighted them with their various notes: but, at length, these all ceased to sing; and then the unslumbering nightingale began her passionate hymn, whose rich melody well atoned for the absence of every other. From the mountain that bounded the landscape there trickled a rill, which, leaping joyously from crag to crag, seemed impatient to mingle with the stream that had found so sweet a resting-place below. They ascended one of the eminences jutting out from the mountain-range, and so gained a commanding view of the scene they had left.

They first looked towards the West, where their beloved Mithra was just sinking from view beneath a canopy of gorgeous clouds. The foreheads of the Magi smote the ground in adoration. "Farewell, beautiful Orb!" cried Aruphon, when they had arisen, "go to thy august repose, thou bright emblem of the Mercy* of God!—right royal is the couch which the crimsoned heavens have prepared for thee, their choicest guest. Carry with thee the blessings of man, whose labours thou crownest, and to whom thou art the symbol of spiritual day. Thou hast retired awhile, but we know that thou hast not abandoned us. Thou hast but resigned us for a time to the eloquent teachings of night. We, timid and frail creatures that we are, dare not look

* Mithra means "Love" or "Mercy."

too steadfastly on the heavens while thou art there ; but, turning our eyes downwards on the earth, we eagerly avail ourselves of thy rays to toil and to scheme. But in Night we find a teacher more consonant with our infirmity : the labours of the day are then over ; and we can look boldly towards the darkened sky, whither the blooming stars invite us to direct our eyes and thoughts. With welcome, therefore, do we hail thy approach, O Night : for manifold are the lessons, and deep the consolation which thou givest to human hearts. Sages, as they have come forth in succession to teach mankind, have forsaken traffic and pleasure to contemplate thy holy face,—to unrol the pages of thy magic book, and to drink of the regenerating fountains thou openest for the soul. The aspiring thoughts which would have felt rebuked amid the glare and noise of day, arise confidently within us, when thou art present : sorrow is hushed to sleep on thy bosom : and the hope of immortality gathers assurance from thee."

Aruphon ceased speaking ; and he and his brethren turned to gaze around them. The city, looking like a huge amphitheatre, was rapidly fading into mist ; every high tower and menacing battlement losing its real shape, and assuming grotesque appearances for which fancy might have wearied itself in finding apt similitudes. The white walls of the fire-temple, which occupied a lofty place to the right of the city, stood out clearly in the twilight ; and its miraculous flame, which, being conducted by tubes to the roof, was visible afar, typified the protecting power of Ormuzd hovering above his chosen fane. Behind the Magi the snowy peak of Orontes, still faintly tinged with crimson by the departing sunlight, rose majestically towards the sky,

amid which glittered the sharp outline of the moon. No sound broke upon the ear: no bird flitted across the firmament: no insect murmured: even the nightingale was for a while mute, and the distant cascade flowed, silvery and still. It was an hour in which the spirit, asserting its independence of the flesh, floats amid scenes, and listens to sounds sweeter than those known on earth;—when the passions that make this world a prison-house, lie in chains at the feet of religion:—when we dread to move or speak lest the pleasant ties that hold us be burst, or the sweet forms that have gathered around us be frightened away. Long did the Magi linger in this abode of beauty, engaged in sublime intercourse with nature: nor was it till the scenery had become lost in darkness, and the stars, those flowers of heaven, were blossoming in clusters beneath the footsteps of night, that they began to return slowly and silently to their temporary home.

Lost in thought, they walked on for some time unheeding whither they were going, till at length they perceived that they had taken the wrong path, and were at a greater distance from the city than before. All around them was waste and melancholy. There were no signs of human habitation: the ground was uncultivated: and a noisome savour soon told them that they were near the public sepulchres of their fellow-believers.

These were two round stone towers standing at some little distance from each other, about twelve feet in height, and one hundred in circumference. The one, intended to receive the lifeless remains of the good, was white: the other, appropriated to those of the wicked, was black. In the middle of the wall of each, at about six feet from the ground, there was a door, opening

into the area within, which was made sloping towards the centre, and left open to the sky at the top. Through these doors, after the proper rites had been celebrated, the corpses, stripped of their gorgeous coverings, were thrown, and there left to be devoured by the birds of heaven: and dreadful was it, even when the cheerful sun was in the sky, to stand beside those gloomy towers, and listen to the doleful sounds that came from them, as the gorged vulture flapped his heavy wings, or the hoarse crows screamed exultingly as they settled down to their hideous banquet.

Fearful of incurring pollution, the Magi were about to retire in haste from the spot, when a sob of human anguish reached their ears. Anxious to ascertain its cause, they approached nearer to the sepulchres; and, at the base of one of them, they saw an old man sitting, his grey uncovered hair and silvery beard glittering in the moonlight.

"My son, my son," they heard him cry, in the trembling accents of age and sorrow, "why wast thou in such haste to die? Couldst not thou have waited till thou hadst placed thy father in the sepulchre? Why hast thou left me to a more bitter bereavement than even that of thy own desolate little ones? And yet they tell me that I must not weep.* Alas! would I could weep: but mine eyes are dry, and my heart seems to be grasped by a hand of iron. Wo! wo! wilt thou never more come to console thy father, my son?" and he began to tear his long, white beard in his agony.

The Magi advanced silently towards the mourner.

"Ha!" he cried, when he perceived the majestic

* "When any one departs from this evil world, no one ought to weep for him."—Sad-der, Porta 97.

form of Aruphon, who was the first to approach him, "thou comest, then, at last. Ingrate that I was to doubt the love of my boy! I knew, Hamed, that I should see thee again:" and he arose to clasp his supposed son.

"Nay, my friend," replied Aruphon, "thy grief beguiles thee: we are strangers: we heard thy lamentations, and are come hoping to console thee."

"Console me!" replied the old man, angry that he had yielded to the pleasing delusion, "then give me back my son."

"We cannot do that," said Aruphon; "but we can bid thee hope to meet him again."

"Why should I hope that any more?" answered the old man. "I have long hoped it; but I have hoped in vain. He comes not! He never will come again. Go,—leave me—you disturb me: I would be alone with my grief."

"He will not come to thee," said Hurmon," but thou wilt go to him."

"Yes, I know," said the bereaved father, "that I shall die too, and, perhaps, be placed by his side in the sepulchre. But what will that avail me? I shall not know him, nor will he recognize me."

"The dead still live," said Aruphon; "the spirit cannot die."

"How can you assure me of that, vain man," said the aged mourner, "did I not see him die? Did I not stand by his couch when the priest whispered in his ear, and when soon afterwards the heart ceased to beat, and the limbs became rigid, and the flesh grew cold—cold—no ice was ever so cold—can such a coldness as *that* ever become warm again?"

"Look at yon stars," said Tachshesh; "think that the son you have lost still lives among them,—is perhaps even now looking upon you: think that you will meet him there."

"I might have believed so when I was young," said the aged sufferer, "but I have seen too much of what is real to be beguiled again by what is imaginary. If he were there, should I not see him? Would he allow me to groan unheeded? How do you *know* that he is there?"

"We do not *know* it," said Aruphon: "but philosophy teaches us to think so."

"Philosophy!" said the old man impatiently, "can philosophy reanimate my son? Go—you surely can never have lost a child. You attempt by your philosophy to console others, but did it ever console yourselves?"

"Yes," said Aruphon, "I have been consoled, when I have lost a friend, by the thought that the soul is immortal, and therefore I hoped that it would comfort you."

"How can *your* belief," asked the old man, "in a system you have yourselves invented, be of any comfort to me? *Has any God told you it is true?* I cannot argue with you: nor can you tell me any thing I have not heard before. Go:—leave me with my dead."

The Magi endeavoured to persuade the old man to return with them to the city: but they could not prevail, and were obliged to leave him there alone, beside those dark palaces of the dead.

"It is indeed vain," observed Tachshesh, as they proceeded towards the city, "to attempt to console sorrow while we can adduce no proof of what we assert. When the imagination is strong, poetry assumes the shape

of belief, and we delight to trace amid the sky the fair images our fancy has drawn there. But we cannot shew them to others: nay, there are times when we cannot trust in them ourselves."

"Yes," replied Aruphon, "we often find it very hard to believe that the whole man is not actually *dead*, when we have seen his body become quite insensible both to kindness and violence,—when we have heard him spoken to by those he loved best, and he has remained mute to their questionings,—when we have seen the foul birds settle down upon him, and he has not lifted his hand to fray them away. Who is to convince us in spite of all that our senses have witnessed that this is not eternal death? 'If a man die, shall he live again?' is the reiterated question of our incredulity. Oh! if but one person had ever come back from that unexplored country beyond the grave,—if our eyes had rested upon his reanimated lineaments, and heard his restored voice, how confident then would be our reliance on what he might tell us of the life beyond the tomb! How strenuous our belief in his wisdom and power! Gathering strength from such an exhibition, we might run to the bedside of the dying and bid him die in peace, nay more, in joy:—we might go to the mourner and cause the rose of gladness* once more to blossom in his heart, by proclaiming that, though we could not shew him the departed one restored to life, we could tell him of one who *had* arisen from the dead, and who had declared that we too should arise in a similar manner. Then might hope, with safety, be permitted to heighten into certainty."

"May the Great King grant us this seal to our

* Tum rosa lætitiæ cordis ejus florebit.—Sad-der. Porta 27.

belief!" Hurmon devoutly exclaimed, "and enable us to feed on the cheering expectation, that we shall not only be reunited to the beloved ones we have lost, but be gathered into that vast company of sages, who, having laboured for the good of man, are now receiving the reward of eternal life!"

The Wise Men soon afterwards reached their home.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH refreshed strength and renewed hopes the Magi resumed their journey at early morn. The glad feelings which had sprung up within them, were mirrored in the loveliness of all around. Fondly did their eyes dwell on the carefully-tended gardens that lined the road,—on the little villages reposing at the foot of the hills, and on the stream which glanced out amid the foliage, bright and cheering as the face of a messenger bringing joyful news. Mountains, covered with verdure almost to their tops, bounded the horizon: and their base was skirted by forests of different hues. Amid the vast plain of the sky wandered a few milk-white clouds, which fancy might have deemed the fleecy resting-places of angels, who were looking down upon the earth, astonished to behold how many of the tints of Eden still coloured her faded robes. The sun appeared to move up the heavens with a slow and measured pace, as though lingering as he came to gaze on the fair landscape which had put on its choicest ornaments to greet him: and occasionally a speck in the distance, would mark the progress of some gigantic bird, leaving its eyry in search of prey.

“How delightful,” exclaimed Aruphon, “are these green fields to us, who have not forgotten our tedious

progress through the desert! How delicious these odorous breezes to us, who have been shuddering beneath the piercing wind of the mountains, or inhaling the fiery breath of the sands! To us every charm is heightened by contrast: the inhabitants of this favoured spot, are probably so accustomed to its advantages, that they scarcely heed them, and we are far more able than they to appreciate its cooling breezes and benignant sun."

"The loveliness of these regions" remarked Hurmon, "thus heightened by contrast, may give some faint idea of the coming Kingdom of that Being who is now never absent from our thoughts. When He shall come what a flood of glory will be poured upon the earth, consecrated by His tread. This glory will, no doubt, be moral rather than natural; but, methinks, when the poet has described plains of surpassing beauty, where the flowers breathe perfume, the trees shed exquisite balm, and the rivers roll over golden sands,—when he has told of cities with gates of pearl and glittering palaces, has he not been unconsciously employing the language of prophecy, and representing something of the glory of the Messiah's kingdom? And since, (as we were forced the other day to confess,) earth is now mantled in a moral darkness, grievous to contemplate, what an additional splendour will the light of the new era gather, when viewed in contrast with the preceding gloom! *Now* we wander on, with timid step, through the paths of life: we know not whither they lead, nor where they terminate: nor do we see the snares which line them till they entangle our feet. We look up to the stars, seeking there some communication of the future, or some direction for the present: but they hang, mute and unconscious, above us: and though we

may sometimes imagine they grow dim as we pour out our sorrows before them, yet is the dimness occasioned only by the tears which gather in our eyes as we regard them. We may resort, like Zoroaster, to the four elements in succession, but not one of them can shew us the face of God, or tell us how we may gain access to His presence. This, however, I believe will be told us by the Mighty One we seek : these marvels will be laid open by Him : and out of the bosom of the darkness now environing us, will arise, at His bidding, the light of truth, brighter, and more universal even than that of yon worshipped orb which is now crowning the mountains with glory, and visiting with its lustre the lowliest vale. When He shall come there will be a voice in every solitude, and a whisper in every breeze, speaking to us of God,—of a God whose worship we shall then understand, and of whose love we shall then be assured.”

“There has ever prevailed among us,” said Tachshesh, “a tradition of some former state of innocence enjoyed by man before sin had withered the flowers, or parched the meads of earth,—before wisdom, insulted by man’s contumacy, returned to her own heaven, and the sacred streams of righteousness rolled back to their source ;* and many a longing look has been cast upon that by-gone loveliness. Happy period ! but will it never return ? Shall the mantle of iniquity never be lifted from this fair creation, nor the clouds of ignorance be scattered from its sky ? Oh ! we will not say that it can never be. Let us rather hope that we shall return charged with the glad tidings that the chains which now confine the native freedom of the soul, are

* Eurip. *Medea*, 411.

soon to be broken off: let us hope that the silvery lilies robing in white yonder bank, which a short time ago we should have found naked and barren, will prove to us a symbol of the flowers of truth and holiness, soon to blossom over the now unproductive garden of the soul. It is delightful to imagine the appearance which the earth will present when reduced under the undivided dominion of the expected King. There will then be no longer vast deserts lying, like unsightly scars, amid the fairest portions of the globe; for, those sterile spots will be covered with flowers and golden grain. From the mountains will be swept the barrenness and the snow: roses will blossom on their sides: and their tall foreheads will ascend to the skies, clothed in perpetual verdure and sunshine. The ocean will not then spread for miles and miles its interminable solitudes; but will be studded with isles, lying like floating gems on its bosom. No tempest shall hover ominously in the sky: the thunder may, indeed, roll, but it will not terrify; and the lightning may flash, but it will not scathe. The trees shall never shed their verdure, but wear, at the same time, the blossom and the fruit. No sickness shall molest the blessed inhabitants: the hills shall echo with gladness, and every vale yield a flowery dwelling-place to rejoicing myriads. Even the savage beasts, laying aside their fierceness, shall submit to be play-mates of the child."

"But this change," observed Hurmon, "would affect only the natural world; and even were it to be effected, man might still be unhappy. Let us try to think how great will be the change in the moral system of the world. When the Desired One shall come, men, casting away their swords and spears, will embrace each other

as brethren, and kneel side by side, like affectionate children, around the footstool of their common Father. The king, laying aside his useless sceptre, will be distinguished only by superior wisdom and virtue: and man, walking erect among his fellows, and fearing only his God, will recognize the dignity of his renovated nature, and scorn either to be, or have, a slave. Then *each one* of the sons of earth, nurtured on the wine of truth, and adorned with the innate majesty of a sinless heart, will be far more fitted to win admiration than the mightiest of the kings and warriors, who have paraded, in childish pomp, before the dazzled eyes of the world. Genius, with wings unfettered by debasing employments, will find a befitting expanse over which to expatiate, and heights to which it may be proud to soar. With the fearless gaze of innocence, and a brow that bends only to Heaven, will the children of that happy era, pass meekly along; nor will sorrow or guilt ever convulse their calm features with the spasm of an unwelcome thought. Passion will not then expend its glowing energies upon trifles, vanishing at the touch; but will desire without disappointment, and enjoy without satiety. The bright eyes of hope will never grow dim, nor the sweet voice of cheerfulness become mute. From the cup of pleasure its poison will be extracted, and holiness will be able to repose, without injury, on the lap of delight. From the understanding all error will be banished: the animosity of sects be unknown; and the lamp of truth, held in a steady hand, and unaffected by the winds of prejudice or impulse, will shed an unvarying light. Gold will mourn its deserted altars, for no one will care to accumulate riches, which will be useless in a world of brethren: and the insolence

of wealth will be driven from the globe, which its abuse has degraded almost to the level of hell. A celestial glory and purity will be shed over earth's provinces: and angels may leave their exalted habitations to find among men associates, not unworthy of the sublime fellowship of the sons of heaven. And, above all, God will then reveal Himself fully and familiarly to His creatures: and the heart of each of them will swell with the conviction that he is the object of His care and love."

"But we dare not expect," said Aruphon, "that these marvellous results will be brought about immediately on the appearance of the Messiah. The progress of truth will undoubtedly be resisted by the spirits of evil, and by wicked men who are the unconscious instruments of their malice. I doubt not the final triumph of goodness; but iniquity is too deeply rooted in the human heart, to be eradicated without a moral convulsion: and the weeds that choke the soil of man's nature must be removed by a patient and careful hand. Deeply honoured, then, will those be whom the Messiah may appoint His servants or assistants in this great work. Having been taught wisdom from His own lips,—having seen the majesty of virtue exhibited in His own person, and having received their commission from His hand, they will be sent forth among men to proclaim His advent, and to urge every heart to bow in willing homage before him. Oh! how noble will be the office of those teachers of mankind! In their doctrine will meet all the scattered rays of truth that have at various periods flung on the world a scanty and doubtful lustre. In this centre they will all converge:—the wisdom of the Past, first uttered by men fresh from the hands

of God, but now only faintly heard across the flood of intervening ages, will be retold by them in more distinct accents; and the glories of the Future, will join to heighten the splendour of their theme. The priest of a more august altar than had ever before been reared, the disciple of the Messiah, will be the bearer of blessings such as no other man has yet been able to bestow. I can imagine him, in imitation of his Master, seeking out the miserable, the ignorant, and the poor,—carrying to their squalid abodes the tidings of a speedy deliverance from want and sorrow,—removing the bitterness of the draught of pain, by shewing them the hand that has mingled it,—bending over the sick-man's couch with news of a better state of being, and declaring that to the good man death is not the barrier of hope, but the gate of life.* Assured by experience that his doctrines are not fabulous and deceptive, his language will be clothed with the eloquence of affectionate zeal: and though fully conscious of his personal unworthiness, yet knowing whence his authority is derived, he will attack vice with a holy courage; and if he brandish before men's eyes the lightning of Divine indignation, it will only be that he may the better win them to listen to the milder revelations of mercy. He will assume, too, the character of an intercessor; and it will be his fondest prayer that others may partake of his privileges, and that every heart may, like his own, beat in unison with heaven. Like one of those celestial birds, which are said† to be ever watching over the welfare of nature, he will pass from clime to clime scattering blessings, and consoling wo."

* "No more the barrier, but the gate of life."—Bp. Porteus.

† In the Zendavesta.

"But do you think," asked Tachshesh, "that he will be welcomed by the mass of mankind?"

"No;" answered Aruphon, "I cannot expect that he will: for the greatest benefactors of the human race, have not seldom been received with dislike and obloquy. It is not with impunity that a man can be wiser or better than his fellows. Men will often submit more readily to be oppressed than to be taught: they lie passive beneath the hands of their tyrants, but they rise with one accord to spurn from them those who seek to make them wiser and happier. Rather, then, may we anticipate that he will meet the more violent opposition inasmuch as his doctrines will shock all opinions generally received as true. The arm of power will probably be raised to crush him: and the man whose heart is overcharged with love to all, will be execrated and punished as a foe to the whole human race. But when God's providence shall have brought about the triumphant period we have been venturing to anticipate, he will not pass undistinguished or without a reward: for he will receive in face of the universe the meed of Divine approbation, richer than jewelled crown or purple robe; and he will be pronounced worthy to bask in the smile of the Highest."

"And it seems to me," said Hurmon, "that a long season of contention between the professors of the new religion, may precede its final triumph over the hearts of men. So vast a range of truth will then be spread before the mind, that it will be scarcely possible that the same prominent points should equally strike every beholder: especially as the only legitimate means of bringing the human understanding to accept the new doctrines, must be moral persuasion and the exhibition

of the beauty of truth, just as the sun causes the flower to expand, not by tearing open its blossoms, but by gently stealing into its heart. Some, probably, will become enamoured of one portion of truth, and others of another: and yet they will all declare that truth is one and indivisible: and thus be anxious that their own opinions should become universally prevalent. And their zeal may be just the more intense on account of the deeper importance of the matters in dispute: for the subject of contest, will not be the kind of aromatic or the number of rods to be used in the daily ministrations, but the method by which the soul can be cleansed, and guilty man made fit for immortality. And if, in the progress of time, any dark error should arise among them, its influence will, doubtless, be yet more destructive through its being a distorted form of Truth, just as we imagine that the hideous features of Ahri-man" (and his voice sunk to a deep whisper as he breathed the name of man's deadliest foe) "gather an additional terror from the marks of celestial beauty still stamped upon them. And then, if human passions come to take *their* part in the fray, and the awful sanction of the true faith be made to add emphasis to a tyrant's cruelty, we may imagine there will ensue a scene of strife and persecution,—a fierce struggle between the powers of goodness and evil, which will exceed in horror anything the world has yet known. But how many a glorious development of truth may come forth in the course of this moral war! The true believer, indignant at the attacks of his adversary, will pry more narrowly into the grounds of his belief,—will examine more carefully every tenet,—will make more earnest endeavours to ascertain the will of Heaven, and,

perhaps, to his importunate researches in spiritual districts before untrodden, will be revealed many a rill of Divine consolation,—many an unexpected oasis of infinite love, to which afterwards others may repair for enjoyment and support. But, at all events, we may be assured there will be no cause for despondency: the storm, should it arise, will be guided by an all-wise hand: and we may believe that, at the last, the raging ocean of contending opinions, will be hushed to a calm, while over the whole extent of its tranquillized waters, will brood the conquering influence of a Prince of Peace.”

Thus did the Magi converse of the glories of the future reign of the King of the Jews, as fancy painted or devotion believed; and, animated by the picture they had drawn, they earnestly longed for its speedy realization.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was with feelings of no ordinary veneration and delight that the Magi entered the land of Judæa. Almost every spot of that favoured territory, had been hallowed by miracle: beside its streams had walked, in holy meditation, the prophets, of whose solitude the winged messengers of heaven did not disdain to become the companions: amid its skies had flashed the lightnings which play at the feet of the Highest: its mountains had been pressed by the tread of Jehovah, and its echoes awakened by His voice. When over all other parts of the earth were spread the darkness and the dream, to *its* inhabitants were vouchsafed the brightness and usefulness of waking life. While to the heathen the name of God was unwelcome, or hailed only as it might be made a sanction for sensuality or pride, by the pious Hebrews it was loved as the name of a Father, who, though He might sometimes chastise, yet still watched over them with tenderness. And the majestic superiority which the Jews claimed for their country, might easily be forgiven, when it was remembered that nearly every spot of its soil, dignified by some supernatural interposition, spoke to them of unexpected deliverance or sudden judgment: and that in their comparatively confined dominions, had been, as

it were, gathered and concentrated the outpourings of Divine Glory and Power. Very highly exalted were they above the rest of the world! Their hopes were not taught to fix on some distant pageant, but might grasp actual and substantial good. Their God had blessed them with present happiness, but still more with the assurance of higher joys to come. The future lay before them, glittering in splendour and triumph: and the pathway leading to it was strewn with flowers. Happy people! had they but proved true to themselves and their God; then would the degradation of bondage, —the heart-sickness of deferred hope,—the extinction of national spirit, and all the other bitter ingredients of their cup of suffering have been spared them; nor would the Shekinah, the token of God's presence, have ceased to hallow their temple with its golden cloud.

To the Magi, of course, the peculiar interest arising from these considerations, was wanting: but they could not be insensible to the natural beauties which met them as they advanced. They passed by rocks where bees had deposited their honey, and which was seen trickling in delicious streams down their sides. They gazed on woods of cypress and oak, and they trod on a soft carpet of variegated moss and scented herbs. The sycamore spread its broad arms over them, and the tall and shapely palm, Judæa's emblem, lifted its head in graceful pride. There were groves of olive and myrtle; there were the fig-tree, the vine, and the pomegranate; and there were the bubbling fountain and the glistening canal. The wild ox was seen plunging in sullen majesty into the forest: the ibex leaped joyously on the hills, and the antelope fixed, for a moment, its bright, surprised eye upon them, and then

bounded away to the thickets. In the more cultivated parts were flocks of goats with long, pendant ears,—sheep with huge tails, and troops of beautiful asses, moving gracefully along. The towns and villages presented many charming pictures, having for their border the dark mountains, from whose fantastic peaks the impetuous eagle* rushed down upon his prey.

Having reached and crossed the Jordan, they made a short stay at Jericho. Winter had swept the blossoms from its bowers, but their senses were regaled by its gardens of balsam, and by its numerous palm-trees, amid which crept the plants which bear those singularly-shaped and fragrant flowers, the peculiar produce of the spot. They roamed over the city, admiring its stately buildings, its columns and aqueducts: they visited the fountain of Elisha, which sparkled amid a group of acacias; and while tasting its sweet waters, meditated much on the miracle there wrought by the prophet: and at length they sat down under one of the gigantic trees of this city of Palms, and suffered their spirits to indulge in the chaste luxury of the scene. But beautiful as was this happy vale, they could not forbear looking forwards with impatience to the holy city which was now separated from them by a space of only twenty miles: in fancy they were already treading its streets, and hurrying with their offerings to the King of the Jews.

In the morning they eagerly recommenced their journey, and pressed on to the City of Peace. There was hoar-frost on the ground, but every particle was glittering in the sun, or falling in shining drops: and the

* M. de Chateaubriand mentions *l'aigle impétueux* as one of the most striking objects in Judæa.

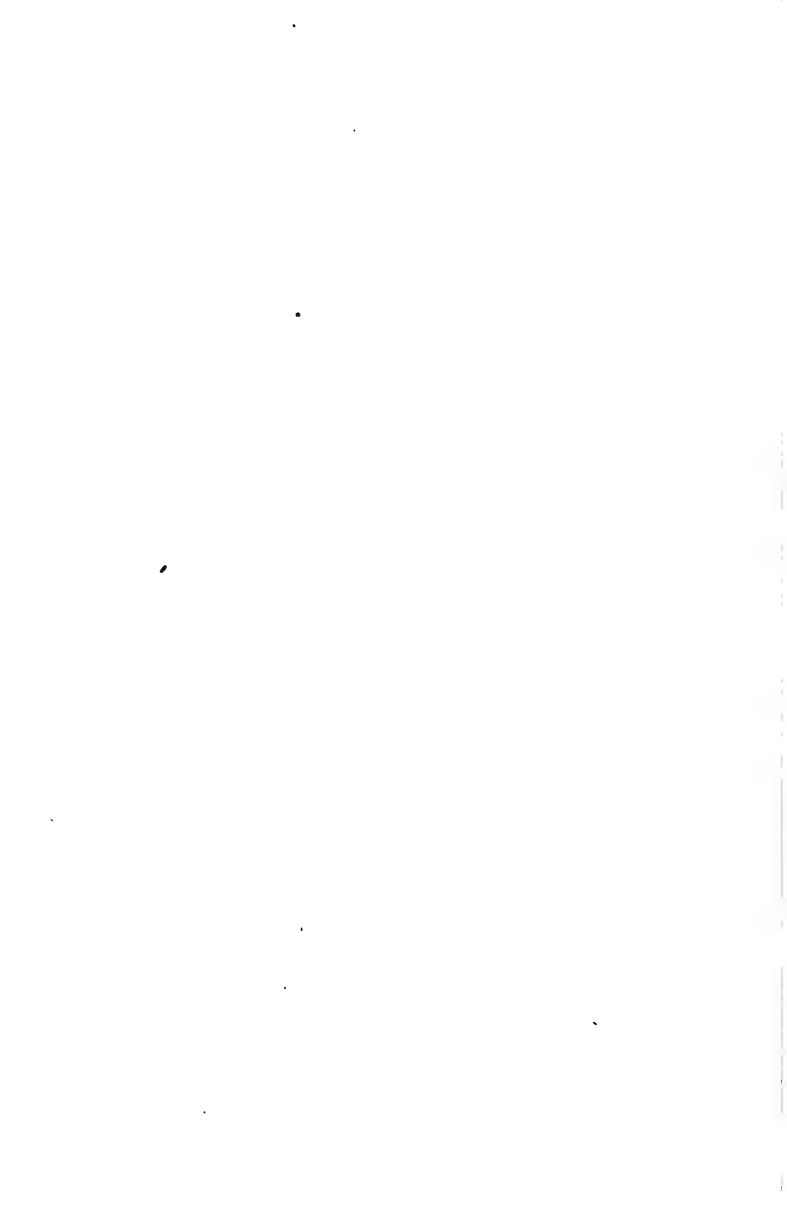
valley was wrapped in a silvery mist from amid which here and there peeped forth some more prominent object, assuming a grotesque appearance in the shifting light.

Great was the joy of our travellers, when, having left the plain of Jericho at a distance behind them, they began to ascend an eminence which commanded a view of Jerusalem. The horizon suddenly opened, and what a most glorious spectacle burst forth! The city lay between two hills:* and the whole intermediate space was filled by a mingled mass of houses, towers, and palaces. One hill, rising to a lofty height, contained the temple and citadel: the other of less, imposing dimensions, was shaped like a half moon, and covered with buildings of various shapes and sizes, which also spread over the vale that lay between. The walls of the city were bristling with numerous towers, among which the three recently built by Herod, were conspicuous. When the Magi suffered their eyes to wander slowly over the diversified prospect beneath—when their gaze passed over the almost innumerable towers that crowded the walls, among which some stood like huge rocks of marble, white and lustrous, new washed, as it were, in an ocean of light—when they gazed on the splendid palace-roofs which arose amid pleasant gardens, and contrasted finely with the tall, dark trees that clustered near—when they saw the intermingled mass of column, dome, and turret that shot up boldly towards the blue heavens—but especially when they looked towards the highest part of the metropolis, and beheld there, towering proudly above the subject city, which it at once hallowed, guarded, and adorned,

* Josephus. Jewish War, B. 5, c. 4.

the Hebrew's mightiest edifice, the incomparable temple, which, from its exceeding whiteness, had very much the appearance of a mountain of snow,* while from its golden pinnacles, flashing in the sun, there was sent forth a hazy splendour that hovered above it like some supernatural atmosphere peculiar to itself,—and when around the whole they saw the range of fortresses, and the mountain fastnesses, by which art and nature seemed to have concurred in enabling the inhabitants to laugh at any attack from external foes,—they could not but think that so glorious a city was meet to be the metropolis of the Expected King.

* Joseph. Jewish War, B. 5, c. 5, 6.

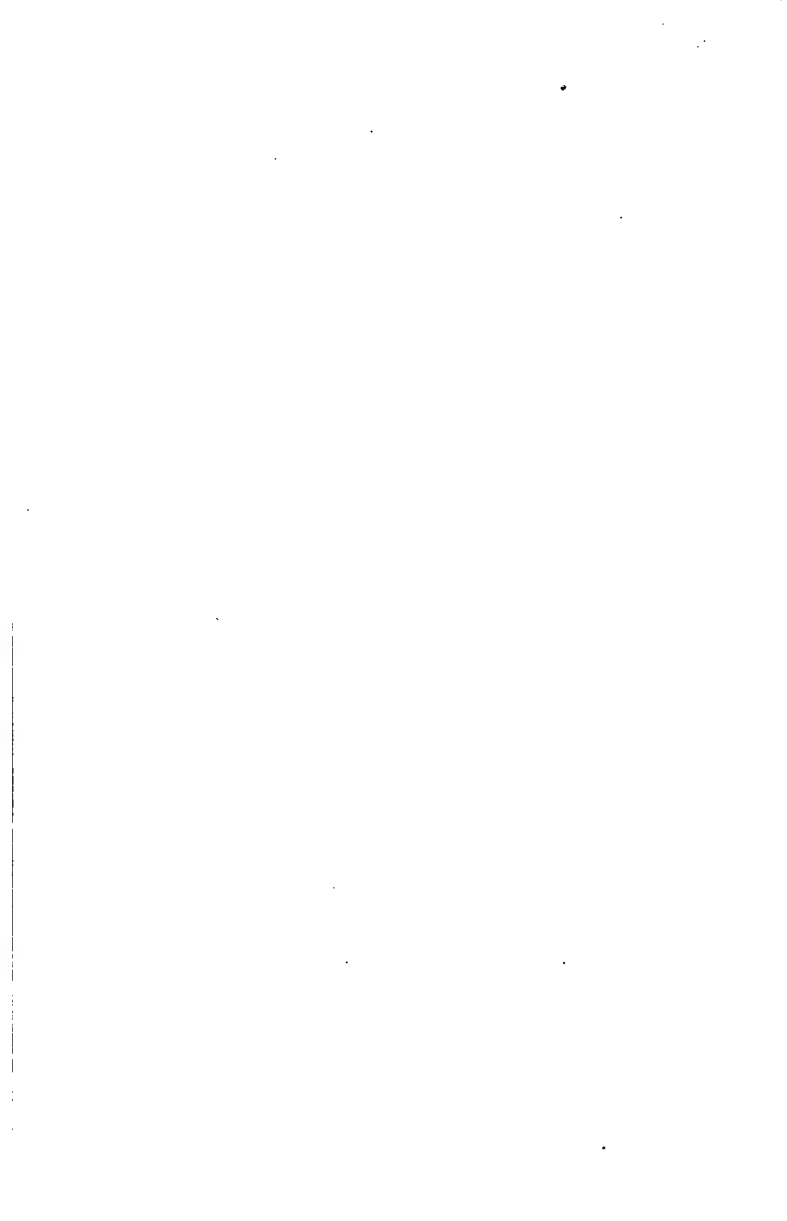


PART THE THIRD.

THE DISCOVERY.

In Morgenlanden
Der Weisheit, fern,
Sahn wir erstanden
Den Himmelsstern ;
Dem voll Verlangen
Wir nachgegangen,
Bis dass wir *fanden*
Hier ihn, den Herrn.

Rückert.



CHAPTER I.

O JERUSALEM! City of Peace!—Lion of God!*—City of the great King!† Once wast thou the metropolis of “a land which was the glory of all lands.” Damascus brought thee of her riches; Arabia, of her spices; and Ophir, of her gold. Monarchs came bowing unto thy king, and listened to his words as to the oracles of heaven. In thee stood the temple of the true God: a temple the architect of which was the Deity, who had promised to hallow it with his presence, and in which every frieze and every pillar, every ornament and vessel teemed with momentous meaning. From thy bosom came forth those mysterious beings, over whom Inspiration hovered, who, laying bare the secrets of immortality, and uttering their prophecies in gorgeous verse, which charmed even while it appalled, stirred in the hearts of boldest men the slumbering presentiments of terror and judgment. True! thy temple has disappeared, and the proclamation of the prophet is no longer heard in thy defaced habitations. But the voice of Fame has sounded out thy praise too loudly for its echoes yet to have died away; for never, no, not in the hour of thy giddiest prosperity, did thy glory spread over a wider circle, or receive a more reverent homage

* Ariel. Isaiah, c. 39, v. 1.

† Matthew, c. 5, v. 35.

than now. The coronet of empire may have been torn from thy forehead, but in its stead thou hast gained the richer diadem of spiritual dominion. Thy very ruins are a monument, inscribed with characters significant of far more than royal sway, or imperial grandeur. Thou wast a vessel in which was enshrined a most costly perfume, and, now thou art broken, its fragrance has gone forth into all lands. Still are thy holy seers man's teachers of wisdom,—still to their recorded visions does he turn to learn the way to heaven. Still to the writings of thy sons does the sage betake himself for instruction, the poet for sublimity, and the penitent for hope. But thy highest glory is, that when the Son of God Himself came to earth to work out His purposes of mercy, thy streets were pressed by His tread,—thy temple echoed to His teachings, and from thy children were chosen His earliest disciples, who scattered the seeds of hope and happiness over an inhospitable world.

The Three Sages, on entering the gates of Jerusalem, thought it prudent to leave their attendants, with the horses and baggage, at the nearest inn; and then went on alone to prosecute the object of their visit.

They had not proceeded very far into the city before they discovered that it was a day of unusual festivity. The street was crowded with the citizens in their holiday attire, and an expression of joy or impatience sat on every face. Our travellers pressed onwards till they found themselves before one of the outer gates of the temple. There were many persons standing about it or entering its porches: some had placed themselves on the steps, which afforded a convenient place for viewing the expected procession: others were hastening to perform their devotions in the interior, or to seek some

acquaintance amid its wide vestibules and aisles, which had become an ordinary meeting-place to the Jews.

The Magi saw, standing at the entrance, a venerable-looking person in the attire of a priest: of him they asked, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews, for in the east we have seen His star, and are come to worship Him?"

"He who is born King of the Jews?" repeated the surprised priest, (who was an adherent of the Herodian party,) "why, know ye not that his name is Herod, and that he was saluted by that title even when a child?*" I imagined that he was not so entirely unknown in the East. Methinks the warriors of Arabia have not yet forgotten his name. But you seem strangers in Jerusalem. Tarry awhile here, and you will see the King of the Jews. Those shouts tell that he is near."

They accordingly took up their station within the area of the entrance to wait the approach of the King: and a momentary feeling of despondency stole over them as they felt how impossible it was to make their errand understood by selfish and worldly men, who would probably consider them madmen or impostors. They had not to wait long.

Herod had that morning been celebrating some of the games of the Circus, in the Roman manner: and though to the great body of the Jewish people their institution had given much offence, yet some were pleased at their adoption; while others, dazzled with the monarch's magnificence, were content to hide their dissatisfaction.

The pompous procession drew near. The sounds of music were heard: the golden ensigns, which the

* See Joseph. Ant. xv. 10, 4.

standard-bearers carried, were seen glittering aloft; and then the gaudy plumes and burnished helmets of Herod's soldiers, flashed in the sun. The veterans, with the scars of many battles on their noble faces, marched haughtily along, and looked down with ill-dissembled contempt on the Jewish multitude, some of whom returned their glances with looks of defiance, which shewed that the spirit of the Maccabees was not altogether extinguished. Behind them were the conquerors in the games, adorned with the usual crowns of victory. After them came some of the chief men of the kingdom, the favorites of Herod, on whom he had lavished his bounty, and bought over to his interest at the price of their self-approbation and the popular esteem. Then came a group of young patricians, from Rome, elegantly dressed and well-mounted, looking around them with an affected air of superiority,—entering with all the spirit of Epicureans into the passing gaieties of the hour,—prodigal of their smiles to the veiled beauties who thronged the casements, and often uttering some jesting remark which called forth a ready smile from those who heard it. And then, seated in a superb chariot, drawn by two horses whose impetuosity was with difficulty restrained to keep pace with the slowly-moving procession,—arrayed in a purple mantle fastened at the throat with a sparkling gem,—wearing a head-dress adorned with precious stones, beneath which his grey hair hung in snowy masses on each side of his lofty brow,—and with his white beard floating on his breast, came Herod in collected and conscious majesty. Though a man of turbulent passions and the victim of inextinguishable jealousy, so deep a guard could he keep over his natural disposition,—so

thick a veil of cunning was he able to cast over the ferocity of his heart, that none but the most attentive and skilled observer, would have detected in his benignant eyes the glances of suspicion and rage which were couchant there. He was surrounded and followed by a body-guard of chosen warriors, who pressed closely by him, and kept the multitude at due distance from his person.

The splendid train passed on to the royal palace which Herod had lately erected : and thither the Magi prepared to follow, musing much, as they went, on the character of the ambitious prince on whose pomp they had been gazing, and the dreadful crimes which report laid to his charge. They remembered the kindred blood he had shed,—they thought of the beautiful youth, Aristobulus, destroyed in the flower of his age,—of the high-minded Mariamne, who found in her own peerless loveliness, and the former affection of her husband, no protection from a tyrant's jealousy,—and of the last blow his madness had struck, by which his own two sons had been subjected to an unjust and shameful death. Thinking on these atrocious deeds, they might be forgiven if, for a moment, some feelings of reluctance and trepidation stole into their minds, when they considered the nature of their errand, and how calculated it was to kindle the inflammable temperament of the King of Judæa ; especially when they knew that, as subjects of an ally or dependent of the Parthian king, who had always been Herod's inveterate opponent, and who had even chased him for a time from his throne, they were exposed to peculiar danger from his vindictive spirit. The recollection, however, of Him, whose ambassadors they were, fixed their irresolution and scattered their

fears ; so that by the time they had reached the palace they were enabled to demand with firmness an interview with the King.

After some delay on the part of the officers of the court, which the perseverance of the Magi at length overcame, the latter were conducted through lofty and spacious halls, which were supported by columns, paved with the finest marble, and adorned throughout with that tasteful magnificence of which Herod was inordinately fond, and were left to wait in a splendid room, through the windows of which they looked abroad over spacious gardens where waved the foliage of long groves of trees, where streams of water, gushing from brazen statues, played fantastically in the air ; and where flocks of tame pigeons were flying in rapid circles, or resting on dove-cots in the court. After a short pause they were summoned to the presence of the King.

The apartment in which they found him, though small, was sumptuously embellished. The walls were partly covered with elegant cedar-work, mingled with golden ornaments, and partly hung with tapestry of gorgeous colouring : the ceiling was enriched with fret-work ; and the recesses were occupied by beautiful vases of various shapes and delicate workmanship ; some of which, being filled with aromatic preparations, loaded the air with perfume. Herod was reclining on a couch or throne, ornamented with ivory, his feet resting on a footstool.

Being commanded to speak, the Magi bowed reverently before the King, and Aruphon said : " We, O King, are Magi from a far distant country, and we seek Him who is born King of the Jews : while in the east we saw His star, and are come to worship Him."

The cheek of Herod grew slightly pale when he heard this unexpected and singular address: there was an angry spot on his brow: and his fiery mood seemed rapidly rising. He looked suspiciously on the Wise Men: but there was something in their appearance which forbade him to dismiss them as impertinent intruders. The monarch quailed before the calm majesty of those holy men, on whose lofty foreheads more than mortal wisdom seemed throned, and whose keen eyes appeared to pierce even to the heart. Herod, too, was superstitious: he had heard much of the wonders of the Magian lore: and he felt that this mystery must be inquired into. To dismiss them abruptly would be to convulse Jerusalem with rumours: for the expectation, long entertained by the Jews, of a coming Messiah, had latterly assumed an intense vehemence; and they would undoubtedly be ready to listen to any one, who should profess to be able to tell them any thing of His advent. He determined, therefore, to temporize: his brow became calm as before, and he replied, in courteous terms, that he would immediately call together an assembly of the Chief Priests and Scribes on the subject, and would afterwards confer with them again.

The Magi were then led from the presence of Herod to a chamber in a remote part of the palace.

The news of the arrival of the Three Magi, and the strange errand upon which they had come, soon spread far and wide through Jerusalem, and gave rise to various and contrary passions. Some expected that, at length, the Messiah was about to appear in all the glory of sovereignty and conquest; and their excited fancy already beheld Judæa the mistress of the world. Others trembled lest the power of Herod should be

shaken, and the station at court, which they had with such difficulty gained, be endangered : others dreaded the approach of some new candidate for the throne, foreseeing with alarm the bloodshed of contending armies, and the havoc of military licence : and some (though, alas ! they were but few) felt arising within them a sacred expectation that, at length, the Prince and Saviour of the Land, the Consolation of Israel, was coming to strengthen the grieving heart, and to wipe off the iniquity of God's chosen people.

Herod immediately ordered a solemn assembly of the Jewish Priesthood to be summoned. Accordingly, the High Priest,—those who had formerly borne that sacred office,—the High Priest's Deputy,—the heads of the twenty-four classes who performed, in course, the ministrations at the temple,—and all other priests and scribes of peculiar eminence for wisdom or sanctity, were directed to attend at the palace. In obedience to the royal command, the holy men hastened thither from all parts of the city. Some with broad slips of parchment, beautifully inscribed with the four appointed sections of the Law, bound on their foreheads and left arms, and wearing over their ordinary dress the sacred garment, the blue fringes of which were conspicuous by their width and the elegance of their workmanship, swept majestically into the hall of assembly. Others, with fewer external signs of piety, entered the room with a subdued air, and seemed filled with anxiety as to the intent of the meeting.

When they were all assembled Herod presented himself before the venerable and learned body, and demanded of them where the Messiah would be born. To this inquiry they were able to give a ready reply. They

unrolled the volume of the Prophets, and turning to the Book of Micah, they read to the King the passage in which the circumstance had been explicitly foretold:—

“ And thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little,
Art to be distinguished among the thousands of Judah,
For out of *thee* shall He come forth unto me
That is to be ruler in Israel.”

The King retired, apparently satisfied, from the assembly: and having secretly summoned the Magi to a private conference, diligently inquired of them the exact time of the star's appearance, craftily hiding beneath a mask of devout solicitude his desire to ascertain the age of the new-born King. They readily answered his questions like men careless of disguise, and not fearing the detection of any discrepancy in their statements. Herod then told them that the priests had declared that it was in Bethlehem that the Christ would be born, and thither he desired them to direct their steps with all possible speed. “Go,” he said, “and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”

The Wise Men accordingly departed from the palace; but the night had now gathered around them, and they were compelled to defer the prosecution of their journey till the morrow.

CHAPTER II.

THE sun had not long appeared above the horizon when the Sages set out for the little town of Bethlehem. They had left Jerusalem at a short distance behind them, when their attention was attracted by a fountain* at the road-side, whose clear waters excited their thirst. They stopped there for a few minutes, and having tasted of the sparkling stream, were resuming their journey, when, on looking upwards, they beheld the mystic star, which they had first seen in the East, once more glittering above them, undimmed by the daylight, and not occupying, as before, a lofty station in the midst of the heavens, but shining at a moderate height above their heads, where it moved on slowly before them, as though to be their guide to the object of their search.

At sight of this unexpected phenomenon every murmur was hushed, all past fatigue and danger were forgotten, and hailing its appearance as a pledge that the end of their extraordinary enterprize was at hand, they gave every fear of disappointment to the winds; and as they gazed absorbedly upon the welcome visitant which waved its golden hair before them, their bosoms bounded with eagerness and hope.†

* *La fontaine où l'étoile reparut aux mages* is mentioned in De Lamartine's *Voyage en Orient*. T. iii, p. 233. (32mo.)

† The original is very expressive, Ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα.—Matt. ii, 10.

Nature seemed to sympathize with their feelings : the sky was bright : the air, fresh and balmy : and the soft, silvery mist which enveloped the earth, but seemed worn more for ornament than concealment, was rapidly melting away before the advancing sun. The road was surrounded by the marks of industry and plenty : vineyards and olive-gardens studded the landscape : and the fig-trees, which frequently adorned the road-side, gave promise, by their vigorous appearance, of abundant fruit in their season. At first, all around them was motionless and silent : no living figure was perceived to break the general repose : and the hollow echo of their horses' feet, had a mysterious sound as they passed along the deserted road. As they advanced, the fields and gardens seemed to awaken, and became animated with the signs and sounds of life. The labourers were seen passing to their accustomed employments : the cattle were commencing their morning meal : the village girl was hastening with her pitcher to a well that stood beneath the shadow of a palm ; and some devout Jews were proceeding to hallow the labours of the day by offering their morning prayers at an oratory which was just distinguishable near a stream in the distance, and which, standing in retirement and secrecy, was a meet emblem of the devotion to which it invited. The Magi were not insensible to the beauties of the spot : and a pleasing tranquillity crept over them, like some happy dream, as they traced the workmanship of the Creator, and felt assured that to them He would prove a God of love.

They journeyed for some time without speaking ; for the end of their strange pilgrimage being at hand, a restraint was cast over their spirits ; and as the solution

of all their doubts seemed approaching, they shrunk back, as it were, lest they should be overpowered by some too dazzling revelation.

Having reached the tomb of Rachel, which stood by the way-side, they stopped awhile to gaze on the simple pillar that marked the grave of Jacob's beloved wife. At present all was harmony and peace: but soon was that mother in Israel to be stirred, as it were, in her grave, through hearing the piteous wail of her children, falling beneath the hands of murderers almost on her very tomb. For, the prophecy was shortly to be fulfilled which had said:—

“ In Ramah a voice was heard,
Lamentation, weeping, bitter sorrow :
Rachel, weeping over her children,
Refuseth to be comforted for her children,
Because they are not.”

Soon afterwards they approached the city of Bethlehem, which was beautifully situated on the brow of a steep hill. It was a small, but picturesque town: the sides of the hill were divided into gardens, well furnished with fig-trees and olives; and the surrounding valleys were diversified with fields covered with cattle, whence the shepherd's voice was heard, calling back his flock from some forbidden ramble, or inviting them to a richer herbage. The whole place had a peculiar, indefinable air of meekness and humility about it: there was an unobtrusive loveliness that won the heart in those little white buildings scattered about in pleasing irregularity—in the vineyards, with their small white huts for the keepers,—and the gentle rivulets that twined, like harmless serpents, across the terraces. The dull masonry of the wall was relieved occasionally

by the elegant outline of some tree which grew near its side : and the towers were all gilded by the sun.

“Surely,” said Hurmon, delighted by all he saw, “surely if Innocence were to come down from heaven to seek a dwelling upon earth, it would fix its abode here. All the pomp of Jerusalem has not impressed me so much as this little town. The houses form so graceful a crown on the forehead of that fruitful hill,—the gardens and vineyards look so cheerful in the sunshine,—the water sparkles so like the smile of some gladsome infant, that we might almost fancy that the inhabitants of this place have escaped the contagion which has infected the rest of the world ; and that the purity which we feared had altogether fled the earth, has been wooed by the loveliness of yonder town to linger yet awhile among her sons. But we dare not expect to find it so : for we know it is not the ground we tread on, or the atmosphere we breathe, but the spirit within us, from which we draw our happiness or misery,—our innocence or guilt.”

“But, my brother,” said Aruphon, “do we not expect to find the Desired One there? May it not be His presence which has thus gladdened the landscape? May not Creation be rejoicing at the advent for which she has yearned so long? Oh! if that Holy Being were to descend upon the most sterile waste, methinks, at the touch of *His* footsteps, flowers would spring from the stony soil, and the rill bubble joyously over the parched ground.”

As Aruphon ceased speaking the travellers entered Bethlehem. And then, to their inexpressible astonishment, the Star which had guided them, descended slowly before their eyes till it rested, like a golden

coronet, over a lowly roof near the middle of the town. The Magi alighted at the house, which was of a very humble description: the door stood open: and as soon as they had passed within it, the STAR disappeared.

Into that hallowed dwelling we can only venture to enter, holding by the hand of the inspired Evangelist, who has thus related what really occurred. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him." Reason, confounded by a spectacle surpassing human comprehension, remains silent in helpless embarrassment;—Imagination would fain give colouring to the simple outline before her, but her hand has become paralysed, and her tints useless:—Faith alone, active and triumphant amid the overthrow of the mere intellectual powers, moves as in her native air, and reigns supreme.

The Magi then arose and retired into an adjoining apartment, where, in the meantime, their attendants had deposited the chests containing their treasures. They proceeded to open their valuable stores. There,—glittered the heap of coin. There,—lay the white frankincense, the yellow myrrh, and the other precious spices which Arabia yields, scattering their rich perfume over the place. There,—carefully deposited in golden caskets, sparkled, like globes of light, pearls, magnificent in size and lustre, the spoils of the Persian gulf: and there,—shone the superb silks, woven in the most celebrated looms.

Hurmon selected for his offering some pieces of gold, stamped with the royal impress. "These," said he, "will I present to this glorious child in acknowledgment of his sovereignty; for undoubtedly He is a King."

Tachshesh took of the sacred frankincense which was burnt in the temples. "This," he said, "shall be my offering to Him, for is He not God?"

Aruphon chose the bitter myrrh, the emblem of sorrow, for his gift. "This," said he, "will I offer to Him; for though He is God, yet He has chosen to stoop to the lowliness of suffering man."

Bearing in their hands these costly and symbolic offerings, the Magi again appeared before the Holy Child, and "presented unto Him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."*

The Magi were afterwards informed, that that day was the first anniversary of the Holy Child's nativity, and they then ascertained that it was at the time of His birth that they had first beheld the mysterious Star.

They spent the remainder of the day with Mary, the Virgin-mother, and her husband, Joseph. Pleasant was the discourse of the happy company thus marvelously brought together; for, on both sides, there was much to hear and much to impart. The Wise Men, having related their vision, eagerly listened, in their turn, to a narrative of the wonderful events which had attended the birth of the Holy Child.

Engaged in conversation on these subjects, the hours rolled very swiftly along: and, for the first time, the Magi suffered the sun to sink beneath the horizon, unsaluted by their accustomed adoration. Their homely meals were consecrated by the blessing of Heaven: and surely it was something more than fancy which told them that through that favoured dwelling were moving

* "The Magi presented to the holy babe gold, frankincense, and myrrh, protesting their faith of three articles by the symbolical oblation:—by gold, that he was a king; by incense, that he was a God; by myrrh, that he was a man."—Bp. Jeremy Taylor.

noiselessly, aerial forms, who had gladly exchanged their own star-paved palaces for the cot of poverty, that they might keep watch round the cradle of the Incarnate God.

The important day was terminated by a devotional service. Joseph read aloud some portions of the Psalms of David : and now every sentence was irradiated with new light, and pregnant with a fuller meaning. The Magi listened with rapt admiration to that inspired poetry ; and determined that henceforth, renouncing the pursuit of a useless philosophy, they would devote themselves to the study of the holy books of the Jews.

Before separating for the night a hymn was sung, expressive of their gratitude and hope :—

Glory to God ! whose power has swept
The clouds of ancient doubt away !
The mists that round our homes had crept,
Have fled before th' approaching Day.

A Star lay on the breast of night :
No throbs of terror shook the sky :
The moon gaz'd from her throne of light,
Nor fear'd the gentle stranger's eye.

Herald of good, it came to shed
Truth's dawn on earth's benighted wild ;
And, stooping from its height, hath led
To Thy bless'd feet, Thou wondrous Child !

At length the mystic key we hold
By which to ope the sacred scrine,
Where Truth 'neath allegoric fold
Lay hid, like ore in darksome mine.

The Prophet's words are true : a son
Born of no mortal sire art Thou :
Ev'n now Thy battles are begun,
And conquest hovers o'er Thy brow.

Hail, Son of God ! go on to pour
Thy balm o'er hearts that sigh for peace.
Earth weeps, as she has wept of yore,
For Thee ; O bid her anguish cease.

Soon let Thy harass'd children hear
Thy voice announcing guilt forgiv'n ;
And life's rough paths of care and fear
Strew with the deathless flowers of heav'n.

Filled with sublime and holy thoughts, the Magi
retired to rest beneath the roof of Joseph and Mary ;
and were divinely warned in a dream not to return to
Herod.

CHAPTER III.

GLADLY would the Magi have remained near that sainted pair to watch the development of the spirit of wisdom which dwelt in the Holy Child. Gladly would they have stayed to hear Heaven's secrets from His lips, and to behold the progress of that work which was to bring about the redemption of the world. But, in obedience to the command they had received in their dream, they took their immediate departure: though it was with great reluctance they turned their backs upon that humble dwelling where abode not only persons so well worthy of their affection, but also the Mysterious Being in whom now centred their every hope.

Without, therefore, going back to Jerusalem, they returned homewards, with their attendants, by another road. The extraordinary difficulties which had delayed, to so late a period, their arrival at Bethlehem, did not arise on their return. On the contrary, the way seemed smoothed to them by an invisible hand. And now, too, within their hearts gushed a fountain of hope which was an ample refreshment for their every toil. On the rising and the setting sun they still gazed with admiration: but their heads were no longer bowed in idolatrous homage: a dawn from on high had looked

upon them, and thither ascended the devotion of their hearts.

“Happy has been the termination of our pilgrimage, my brethren,” said Aruphon, on one occasion: “Bethlehem Ephratah has, in very deed, been to us the House of Bread and the Fruitful: for we have there found the bread and fruit which will be the everlasting nourishment of our souls. We have seen the King of the Jews: His palace is a cottage, and His throne a cradle. Oh! meet resting-place for the agitated mind, which, wearied out with the abstruse inquiries and gorgeous reveries amid which it had sought for Truth, now finds it in the simplicity of childhood, and the humility of innocence! We have searched creation in quest of God,—we have looked for some revelation of his will in the manuscripts of the wise,—we have endeavoured to justify the ways of providence by a careful examination of the history of our race, but we have found little but doubt and dissatisfaction; and now, fully conscious of the vanity of our own wisdom, we cling to this marvellous Child as our only refuge. To the Past there is for us no return: we can never more be what we have been: we must keep our eyes fixed on the Future, and press onwards to the glittering goal before us. And should we *now* be deceived,—should this our last hope fail us, we are of all men most miserable.”

“The fear of such a result is needless,” interrupted Hurmon, “and its indulgence is ungrateful. God has guided us to the spot which He has chosen for His earthly tabernacle, and shall we dare to think He will forsake us at last? In having done so much for us already, surely He has given us a pledge that His purposes of mercy towards us will be accomplished.”

“I *have* no fear, in this respect,” replied Aruphon, “but the moral splendour which now surrounds me, deepens my past ignorance into a darkness that may be felt. So highly do I value the jewel of Truth, which I now hold, that I cannot but tremble at its imaginary loss, though I know that it can never be wrenched from me. No, Hurmon! I do not fear. The fires of our altars may be extinguished,—Mithra himself may abdicate his burning throne; but *this* light will never go out. In what manner the Holy Child will perform the work He has undertaken, and will take away the sins of the world, I cannot tell: nor will I too curiously inquire. It is enough for me to believe that He will do it. Deeply convinced of my own ignorance and weakness, I aspire not to pry into the counsels of God: I fall submissively at His feet: I feel, in faith, the support of His hand: and I believe that as He has for us descended from heaven, we shall ascend thither through Him. O my brethren, share in my joy: all will at last be well: He is our King, and He will save us.”

“I do share thy joy, O Aruphon,” answered Tachshesh, “for, in faith, I, too, behold the approaching triumph of Goodness. The conflict between Light and Darkness may, indeed, long continue, even in the hearts of the subjects of this heavenly King: nay, it will probably become more severe: for, to the soul that has been made conscious of true purity, sin will appear with a tenfold hideousness: and the true believer, struggling against the power of Evil, will weep and shudder as he sees more and more the vast difference between his own works and that pure morality he has been taught to love. But he will not despair: for, in the darkened

firmament, the STAR will still shine,—the omen and the cause of final victory. Amid his worst conflicts there will be the assurance,—better than the guardianship of visible angels,—that One is standing at his side, who, having shared the innocent infirmities of man, is bound to him by the ties of kindred sympathy.”

“And I, too, firmly believe,” said Hurmon, “that the triumphs of the Redeemer over the individual, and over nations, will be ever going on till He shall reign without a rival. The dusky Ethiopian and the hardy sons of the North, will meet together under His sway, swelling the glorious band which shall own the sovereignty of a more glorious King. From every corner of the earth will come forth the converted multitudes to worship at the footstool of the true God; for the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdoms of His Son. And when, at last, earth’s most beauteous fabric,—from which, even now, man’s lengthened iniquity has not quite blotted out the traces of paradise,—shall be taken down, (for, being material, we may presume it will at length pass away,) it will live for ever in the records of eternity, as having been the favoured spot in which the Son of God pitched the tabernacle of His humiliation, and as having been the birth-place and the battle-field of the triumphant group He will have gathered round His throne.”

The Providence which had led the Magi to Bethlehem, conducted them back in safety to Balkh: and it was with feelings not to be expressed, that they came again in sight of the haunts of their youth, and gazed once more on the familiar groves and the temple with its Eternal Fire, the scene of their daily ministrations, which were now never to be resumed. To the

impatient multitude, who crowded around them, they proclaimed the fact of the Messiah's advent. By some the news was received with joy,—by many, with unbelief,—by others, with contempt,—and the most part, lending to it a careless and pre-occupied ear, soon forgot all they had heard amid the engagements of pleasure or business. The priests of Buddha returned to their cells, secure that their loved retirement would not be disturbed by the triumphs of a new faith: and the worshipper of Brahma, remembering his gigantic temples and magnificent mythology, refused to recognize in the birth of an obscure infant, the Avatar of the true God. By the greater part of the Magian priesthood the account was received with disappointment. *This* was not the kind of Deliverer they had anticipated, nor *this* the mode in which they had imagined his public appearance would be made; and the Archimagus shook his hoary head incredulously as he listened, and doubted whether the ancient splendours of Ormuzd and Mithra could possibly be eclipsed by a new religion, sprung from so mean an origin.

The Three Wise Men, however, mused much in secret on what they had seen; and read the Hebrew Scriptures attentively to discover the prophecies which had relation to these marvellous events. In the mean time, the great drama proceeded slowly on to its development. They soon heard of the barbarous massacre of the infants of Bethlehem, by which Herod vainly thought to silence the pretensions of the newborn king, and to wither that flower of glory in its earliest bud. Then there ensued many long years, during which they heard no tidings of the Holy Child. But at length news was brought them that Jesus had

commenced His public ministry, and was proclaiming throughout Judæa the doctrines of truth. Eloquently and earnestly (they were told) did He discourse to the multitudes, who hung with rapt attention upon His lips, of subjects the most interesting and sublime. He incited not to war: He exposed not errors of civil polity: He flattered not the prejudices of the populace: He poured forth no torrents of enthusiasm: but calmly and seriously He denounced sin, summoned to repentance, and whispered in the ears of obstinate offenders the subdued mutterings of Divine wrath.* But He pronounced pardon to those who were weeping for their transgressions,—He sought out, with tidings of consolation, those who had been spurned or trodden down amid the mad hurry of the world,—He announced Himself to be the friend of those unfortunates who had no other one, and declared those to be blessed whom all men considered deprived of every joy. He pronounced the meek victims of sorrow and oppression to be the favoured and honoured of God: and, scattering the mists which had veiled the towers of eternity, brought out in bright development the far-off prospects of heaven.† And they were told that among the listening multitude, the wan face was seen to brighten with unwonted hope, as the hearer gathered assurance of a reward above: and the eyes that had, at first, been fixed timidly on the ground, as though the listening sinner were apprehensive that the iniquities he had so deeply mourned, would now be exposed and punished, were, at length, lifted in confidence towards the Saviour, kindling with expectation, as a promise of pardon was held out to the penitent.‡ But there were some who

* Matt. iv, 17: v, 21, &c. † Matt. v, 2-12. ‡ Luke vii, 37-50.

listened with far different feelings: they heard no flattering commendations of what they supposed to be their superior merits: they heard no tender palliations of sin,—no method by which the honours of virtue could be associated with the practice of vice,—no promise of earthly power and pleasure: and they broke away indignantly from His presence.* And whithersoever the Divine Teacher went, around Him were brought the sick, the maimed, the halt, and the blind: and lo! at His touch sickness and deformity passed away: the blush of health mantled in the livid cheek, and the vigour of youth nerved the enfeebled limb.†

They were told of the stern opposition which the Jews offered to His instructions: and, at length, the news was brought them of His crucifixion and death—that awful spectacle from which the sun shrunk,—when the massive earth quaked,—when rocks were cloven as with a giant's mace, and sepulchral caverns, bursting open, displayed the shrouded dead. But they were likewise told of His glorious Resurrection; when He tossed aside the stone of His sepulchre as a traveller shakes off a withered leaf, that had fallen upon him during his slumber in the forest,‡—and of the triumphant Ascension which had followed.

At last, St. Thomas,§ (one of the Apostles of the ascended Redeemer, who were carrying their glad message, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost into every land) came to Persia and Bactriana: and the Three Magi, now bending beneath the weight of nearly seventy years,

* John vi, 66. † Mark vi, 55, 56.

‡ See Manzoni's *Inni Sacri*. "La Risurrezione."

§ An ancient writer asserts that the Magi who came that long journey from the East to bring presents to our Saviour, were baptised by St. Thomas, and assisted him in the propagation of the gospel.—Cave's *Life of St. Thomas*.

received at his hands the waters of baptism. Then, when the full knowledge of Christianity was revealed to them, every doubt was removed. They had before felt the necessity of a Teacher and Saviour: and they found that in Jesus this necessity was fully supplied. In His pure and sublime doctrines, which afforded full scope for the highest faculties of the soul, they found all philosophy surpassed; while in the authority of their Propounder, justified and sustained by the miracles wrought by Himself and His disciples, they found that sanction which no other system possessed. They saw men, strengthened by faith, renounce pleasure, confront death, and with eyes fixed on the brilliant rewards of the future, despise all the annoyances and perils that beset their path. They beheld the new grace of Christian humility shedding over the moral character the majesty of meekness. In the Apostles were realized those teachers of wisdom whom their fancy had painted; and they looked forwards, with confidence, towards the time, when the whole earth should be renovated by the doctrines they taught.

The last days of their lengthened lives, were cheered by the success of the ambassadors of the Cross. Won by the instruction and example of the preachers of Christianity, many of the Persians gave a ready ear to the doctrines of truth, and, fixing no longer an adoring gaze on the material sun, or bowing before idolatrous altars, turned away from them to gaze, with purified and strengthened vision, on the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, as He arose with healing in His wings, and gradually advanced towards His meridian height, crimsoning the whole horizon with the rays of Truth.

And noble were the triumphs which Christianity, in

a subsequent century, obtained in Persia: long did the brave and faithful band of Christians oppose, by their meekness, the bitter persecutions of the proud priesthood of Zoroaster, once more restored to their former influence, during which they suffered atrocities of which it is horrible to read. "The Persian believers," says the eloquent Bishop of Cyprus,* "who had learned from Zoroaster to expose their dead to dogs and birds, now cannot endure to do so, but bury them in the earth, disregarding the laws which forbid them so to do; nor do they fear the cruelty of their tormentors, having greater dread of the torments threatened by Christ. They laugh to scorn the things which are seen, delighting rather to gaze, in holy vision, on those unseen things which they reverence. They refused not to receive laws from the men of Galilee: and those who had not quailed before the power of the Romans, yielded of their own accord to the dominion of the Crucified. Neither Augustus nor Trajan, who overturned their empire, had compelled them to accept the laws of Rome: but the writings of Peter and Paul, and the four Evangelists, they revered as brought down from heaven; and the natives of Persia subjected themselves to the laws of strangers and aliens."

The Magi received no mean reward for their piety, even on earth. From their hands did the Messiah accept the first offerings of the Gentile world: and to them was vouchsafed the honour of being to the nations of the East the heralds of the advent of the King of Kings.

* Theodoret. Therapeutic. Serm. ix, p. 128, edit. 1592. He especially mentions the Bactrians at p. 125.

